



THE EVERYDAY AND PRIVATE LIFE OF A COMMUNIST RULING CLASS

GREED AND CREED

GYÖRGY PÉTERI

The Everyday and Private
Life of a Communist
Ruling Class

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To Alva, Elias, Klára, Kolya, Lóri, Miki, Sonia, Theo, and Vanda

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Preface

CONFESSIONAL

Instead of going directly to the “realist” tale (i.e., to provide the reader with an “objectivist” representation and analysis of “what the sources reveal”), I would like to start in a “confessional” mode.¹ I have had personal experience with what I am reporting about in this book. The only correct way of describing this experience is to say that I used to be a native of the field observed. I was brought up in the 1950s and 1960s in a nomenklatura family in Budapest. From November 1956, my father, István Péteri, was a functionary in the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party’s (MSZMP) Central Committee apparatus. From 1958 onward, he ranked second—his title was deputy chief of department—at the Department of Administrative Affairs of the Central Committee. In May 1963, he was transferred to a national authority of the status of a government ministry. He worked until his retirement in 1981, as the first ranking among three vice presidents of the Central Committee of People’s Control (KNEB).²

I lived in my parents’ home during the first 22 years of my life, benefiting from most of the privileges yielded by my father’s position. These privileges included, among other things, a considerably better-than-average housing; unlimited access to a state-owned car (from 1965, it was a black Mercedes 230 which, together with its chauffeur, Sándor Fábián,

stood at my father's disposal even after working hours, with no limits as to mileage, week days, or time); access to the country's best resort areas at the Balaton Lake and elsewhere; access to other state-socialist countries' *nomenklatura* resorts; access to an above-the-average equipped healthcare infrastructure (including the services of the National Central Hospital of Kútvölgyi Street); and access to opportunities of hunting (and fishing) in some of the country's finest wild-life areas. From the age of six until around seventeen (i.e., between 1957 and 1968), I regularly joined my father on his hunting excursions, practically every weekend except for the summer months.³ My parents also belonged to those who, in the late 1960s, had the resources to get into the possession of a small property at a backwater system of the Danube right outside the village of Ráckeve where they built a cabin and spent most of their weekends from March to October.

All this might sound as if this was a well-to-do family. The answer is yes and no at the same time. "Yes" because of what I've already revealed above. "No" because of the following: there were three children in the family and one grandpa who passed away at the age of 86, when I was 16. He received a very modest pension from the Hungarian Railways where he worked less than a decade as a conductor. My mother, on the other hand, retired early, with a meager disability pension at the end of the 1950s, due to a chronic condition. Yes, we lived better than the great majority in Hungarian society, yet modestly, six people by and large on one, although good (my father's) salary.



Figure P.1. The Author (under his Mother's Arm) and His Family at One of the First Summer Vacations at Lake Balaton, Probably in 1957. *Source:* Author's private collection.

I remember vividly how carefully my parents had to husband with their income. We ate meat only on Sundays. (I will return to the significance of hunting in this regard.) In my childhood, my favorite meal was *krumplis tészta* (pasta with potatoes), but I am sure I would have swapped it for *rántott hús* (pork cutlet or chicken breast à la *Wiener Schnitzel*) without hesitation if only we could have had the latter more regularly than some weekends in a year. We hardly ever went to a restaurant—the only rare exceptions occurred when my mother spent three to four weeklong periods at a provincial hospital (a sanatorium based on thermal water and peat mud of the Hévíz lake in southwestern Hungary) specializing in the treatment of musculoskeletal conditions, and we visited her.

I have a cookbook used by my mother in the 1950s and 1960s. In it, I found her handwritten notes she jotted down in preparation for a Christmas—detailed plans for the meals she wanted to prepare and the presents my parents intended to give members of the family as well as to my father's chauffeur, "Uncle Fábián."⁴ Me and the younger one of my two brothers got the most costly presents: a pair of new Winter shoes and a pair of gloves for Forint 300; Uncle Fábián was next in terms of the cost of his present (it is not clear from the notes what it was) that cost Forint 203.

As was mentioned earlier, my parents decided in the second half of the 1960s to lease a small plot and build a simple cabin onto it. The "dacha" consisted in one tiny kitchen, one bedroom, and a small toilette. "Shower" was outside the house, the water coming from a metal barrel above our head. Despite its simplicity, the project demanded of the family to undergo a long lean decade, not merely a few lean years.

I have a great deal of experience and memories from those times (from the second half of the 1950s to the end of the 1960s, early 1970s) and, I believe, not to draw on them or even veil or just to ignore them while writing this book on the everyday and private life of the party-state apparatus class of communist Hungary would be dishonest as well as foolish. A few times, especially when it comes to the discussion of hunting, I make this experience explicit. Most of the time, however, I have simply allowed it to inform the directions of my empirical research, my questions, and approaches. Thus, the reader of this book should not be mistaken in her expectations: I am not intending to give an account of what I partook in or saw and heard, as is usual in the genre of memoirs. This is a scholarly work based on solid empirical research carried out in a broad range of archives, in writings and imagery that were published in print, and interviews.

The aim of the project underlying this book has been to offer some new ways toward understanding the state-socialist social order, its political class, and the communist attempts at modernizing the societies of Eastern and East Central Europe. Political (and policy-) histories tend to conceive

communist functionaries as stylized, highly abstract constructions instead of flesh and blood humans. In terms of the explanatory strategies they offer, these constructions operate along the simplistic algorithms of ideology (purity vs. contamination) and/or power (maximizing hegemonic position and exclusivity regarding the political domain through coercing, oppressing, corrupting, etc.). Studying the everyday and private life of the party-state apparatus class, I believe, enables us to acquire a more complex picture of the communist functionary. It helps us to understand what made him “tick” as a person: what his personal desires and dreams were, what he wished to achieve, what kind of values and goals informed his practices in everyday and private life. This way, I am confident, we might be able to open new ways of understanding policy-making and other political and social processes as well, without intending to propose any reductionist schemes.

The social group observed in this book, the party-state apparatus class, distinguished itself from the rest of society not by its formal ownership of the means of production, as classes do in the Marxian scheme of class formation. With all, or practically all the productive capital centralized in the hands of the state, the party-state apparatus class distinguished itself primarily by its members’ exclusive access, at all the various levels of state power, to positions of decision making on behalf of the party-state and its various entities over the means of production. This is the class that rules over economic activity, the generation and appropriation of surplus, and all the ways and manners in which expanded reproduction is taking place. While much of the empirical (archival) evidence I am relying on is pertinent to the higher (elite) echelons of the *nomenklatura*, the lower boundaries of this class go at the level of local power (functionaries of district councils and party organizations, CEOs of various firms and co-operatives), all the way down to the level where decisions are still made and not merely executed.

I am fully aware of all the major attempts at theorizing about class formation and, particularly, about the rise of a “New Class” after the socialist revolutions, or Communist takeovers and coups, from Jan Machajski, through L. D. Trotskii, to Milovan Djilas and György Konrád and Iván Szelényi.⁵ Admittedly, these writings have influenced and inspired me to some extent. Yet, this project’s agenda is not to engage in social theory, neither in class theory. Rather, this book moves along a path more like Michael Voslensky’s book, the *Nomenklatura*.⁶ But it is far from being merely a replica, resting on different empirical grounds, of Voslensky’s book, even though much of my findings resonate quite well with his. To a great extent, the evidence presented by Voslensky is to reveal the true nature of the regime and its ruling class, to show the stark contrast and, indeed, even contradiction between their greed and the creed they

preach. Beyond the revelatory, Voslensky's analysis pursues intellectual objectives pertinent to understanding political tendencies and policies. My study, on the other hand, serves to better understand the apparatus class as a social-cultural entity and its significance for the rest of society and for the kind of modernity that emerged in post-war communist Eastern Europe in the domain of everyday life.

It needs to be emphasized that this book is *not* inviting the reader for a peep show into the everyday and private life of the apparatus class nor is it to indulge in trying to scandalize the reader by way of exercises in moralizing and condemnation over what is unveiled. Rather, it is meant to shed light upon the values and preferences at work in the everyday practices of the members of this class. Thus, the hope is also that I will be able to contribute to a better understanding of the complex ways in which *modern everyday* came to the shores of state-socialist Hungary. Similarly to its economic and technological development and similarly to a great majority of the countries of Communist East Central Europe, Hungarian society had a peripheral, backward, and late-coming position in the global order also with regard to adopting and domesticating technologies, infrastructure, and practices that together had defined modern everyday by the middle of the twentieth century. The complex processes bringing modernity to farther and farther peripheries of the human world are always socially situated. Certain social groups tend to play a decisive role in shaping and informing the kind of modernity that will emerge. My hope is that I will be able to demonstrate for, and persuade the reader about, the view I came to hold as a result of my work: however dismally it performed as the avant-garde that was supposed to lead society toward a communist paradise, the party-state apparatus class did indeed play a major role with regard to the shape of modern everyday and private life under state-socialism. Of doing so, they were much less aware than they would have wanted to admit. If there was a case to which Georg Lukács's favorite Marx quote, "They don't know but they do it"⁷ truly applies, this is undoubtedly one.

NOTES

1. For the distinction between the realist and confessional genres, and also other thoughtful distinctions pertinent to the various writing conventions and representational styles prevalent in ethnography (anthropology), see John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field. On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

2. KNEB (*Központi Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottság*—Central People's Control Commission) was the state audit authority with wide-sweeping mandates and powers to control, from the point of view of law and national political objectives, the

working of all sectors and all units operative in the country's economic and social life (all business operations irrespective of the form of ownership and all other operations funded publicly). KNEB had the same legal status as the Supreme Court or the Attorney General's Office. Its president had the rank (State Secretary) next to Minister, while his first deputy (my father) was ranking as Vice Minister. They were appointed by the Presidential Council of the Hungarian People's Republic.

3. In the late spring and summer months of May–August, we went fishing.

4. The chauffeurs of party-state bosses tended to a considerable extent to get integrated in families they served.

5. Cf. Marshall Schatz, *Jan Wacław Machajski: A Radical Critic of the Russian Intelligentsia and Socialism* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989); Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (Dover Publications Inc., 2004); Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957); George Konrád and Iván Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979).

6. Michael Voslensky, *Nomenklatura. Anatomy of the Soviet Ruling Class* (London, Sydney, and Toronto: The Bodley Head, 1984).

7. “Sie wissen es nicht, aber sie tun es – Marx” was the motto of Georg Lukács's two-volume work *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen*. Cf. Band 11. of *Georg Lukács Werke, Ästhetik Teil I* (Neuwied am Rhein, Berlin Spandau: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag GmbH, 1963).

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Long time as it took to complete this book project, it has been inevitable that the work could and did benefit from several of my previous publications of journal articles and book chapters. My thanks are due, therefore, to Brill Publishers, Cornell University Press, Lund University Press, Northwestern University Press, and the journal *Social History* for their permissions to utilize extensively in this book my following publications:

- "Streetcars of desire: cars and automobilism in communist Hungary (1958–1970)," *Social History* Vol. 34, No. 1 (February 2009): 1–28 – in chapters 1 and 6;
- "Demand Side Abundance. On the Post-1956 Social Contract in Communist Hungary," *East Central Europe* (Brill), 43 (2016): 315–343 – in chapters 1–3;
- "Consumer and Consumerism under State Socialism: Demand Side Abundance and its Discontents in Hungary during the Long 1960s," chapter 1 in Löfgren, Orvar, and Czarniawska, Barbara, eds., *Overwhelmed by Overflows? How People and Organizations Create and Manage Excess* (Lund University Press, 2019): 12–43 – in chapter 1;
- "Nomenklatura with Smoking Guns: Hunting in Communist Hungary's Party-State Elite" in David Crowley and Susan Reid, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010): 311–343 – in chapter 4;
- "Alternative Modernity? Everyday Practices of Elite Mobility in Communist Hungary, 1956–1980," chapter 3 in Lewis Siegelbaum, ed., *The Socialist Car: Automobility in the Eastern Bloc* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011): 47–68 – in chapter 6.

Acronyms

- CC: the *Központi Bizottság* (Central Committee) of MSZMP, a large collegial body (the number of its members was between 100 and 150 throughout the Kádár era). It was the top “legislative” organ of the party between two congresses. But in the everyday parlance of the party-state apparatus (and the country), the party’s top executive apparatus (the CC Secretaries and Departments sorting under the CC and the PB) was also called *KB*.
- GB: Gazdasági Bizottság (Economic Committee)—a collegial body consisting in a narrow selection of government members (ministers) with economic policy mandates; its main task was to prepare the government’s major economic and social policy decisions but they themselves had the mandate to issue law-like (enforceable) resolutions that the country’s bureaucratic-economic agencies had to abide by.
- KB: same as CC.
- KEB: MSZMP KB Központi Ellenőrző Bizottság—the Central Committee of Control of the MSZMP, the highest disciplinary body of the party.

- KNEB*: Központi Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottság (Central People's Control Commission) was the national (central state level) audit authority, with the rank of a government department.
- MMB*: Mezőgazdasági Múzeum Budapest (Museum of Agriculture, Budapest)
- MOL*: Magyar Országos Levéltár (National Archives of Hungary)
- MSZMP*: Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party—the name of the communist party ruling over Hungary from December 1956).
- MTA LT*: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Levéltára (Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences)
- OSA*: Open Society Archives, Budapest
- PB*: the Political Bureau of MSZMP's Central Committee, the most powerful collegial body of the party with between eight and fifteen members throughout the Kádár era (1956–1989). Between two meetings of the KB, it is the PB that oversees and controls the work of the party's executive apparatus (the Central Committee Secretaries and the Central Committee apparatus with its various departments controlling the various domains of policy making).
- PGO*: MSZMP KB Pártgazdasági és Ügykezelési Osztálya—the Central Committee Department of Party Economy and Administration, responsible for organizing, funding, auditing, and so on, of all the economic and records administration within the party apparatus. All the MSZMP county organizations had their own PGO departments, and all the party's district organizations had one or several "pgo-referents."
- OT*: Országos Tervhivatal—the National Office of Planning, the governmental authority of central planning.
- SZKL*: Szakszervezeti Levéltár (Archives of Political History and the Trade Unions, Budapest).
- SZOT*: Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa—the National Council of Trade Unions in Hungary.

Chapter 1

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Consumption, Consumerism, and Demand-Side Abundance

Whether it is done by historians, anthropologists, or sociologists, the study of everyday life, of human practices in everyday settings is always a study of *consumption*—a study of the use and reliance on services and goods (artifacts) appropriated from Mother Nature and to one or another extent processed to enable us to reproduce (and procreate) human life.¹ When we talk about consumption regarding state-socialist societies, however, the first thing that comes to mind is shortages, insufficiency, a lack of almost everything (rather than abundance).

Indeed, shortages and their consequences were a prime subject for Eastern Europe's social scientists of the Cold War era. János Kornai rightly observed in 1978 that the idea of a demand-constrained capitalist *versus* a resource-constrained socialist economy was almost as old as the state-socialist economic order itself.² As early as 1924, Lev Kritsman noted that “while the capitalist commodity[-producing] economy is characterized, in general, by excessive supplies, the [typical state of affairs in the] proletarian-natural economy is general shortage.”³

As is well known, Kornai devoted a great deal of effort to theorizing about the phenomenon of sustained shortages in socialist economies. In his *Anti-Equilibrium*,⁴ presented as a critique of the general (Walrasian) theory of equilibrium, he suggested an alternative framework for thinking about economies in general. His claim was that modern economies were typically non-equilibrium economies—their normal state was either that of “suction” (sustained shortages of goods and services) or that of “pressure” (sustained overflow [supply in excess of effective demand] of goods and services). In his *Economics of shortage*,⁵ then, Kornai took a

major step toward offering a system-related explanation for the reproduction of shortage in the socialist economy. The culprit he identified was the soft budget constraint under which the producers—the firms owned by the states—operated.

Significantly, and although Kornai and his younger associates did devote some attention to aspects of household (consumer) behavior under conditions of shortage,⁶ Kornai's discussion remained firmly within the world of production. One of his enthusiastic Soviet reviewers, R.G. Karagedov⁷ praised Kornai's work, for it had accorded primacy to production. Iván Szelényi, like a number of other reviewers, welcomed *Shortage's* focus on production, for Szelényi believed that it enabled the author to discard weak explanatory strategies that related shortages to imperfections in retailing and/or planning. As Szelényi put it:

Unlike most economists who study the problem of shortage, Kornai moves beyond the sphere of consumption and develops his theory from the analysis of contradictions in the system of production/ reproduction. Consequently, he chooses the firm as his basic unit of analysis. With probably too much modesty, Kornai calls his approach "microeconomic," but of course he uses the firm—as Marx used commodity in the case of the capitalist mode of production—as a "crystal ball." By looking into it, one can see and comprehend the complexity of macroprocesses in the socialist economy.⁸

But the "productionist" perspective does precious little to thematize and problematize the consumers' actual role, experience, and practices—even less to analyze how they had to navigate in a social world shaped and structured, among other things, by systemically contingent shortages. Serguei Alex Oushakine⁹ rightly emphasizes that the state-socialist economy could just as well be characterized as an economy of *storage*—an economy in which a vast number of products never find their way out of the storage facilities of factories or retailers, for the simple reason that no one needs or wants them. From the consumer's perspective, however, it makes little difference that, although their everyday experience was predominantly with quantitative and/or qualitative shortages, "goods" (good for nothing) were filling warehouses.

Even the idea that the consumer should, by definition, have an agency in the sphere of economic activity seems to have been all too often absent from (or hardly reflected upon in) the writings and ideas of many of Hungary's reform economists.

THE CONSUMER CITIZEN OF STATE SOCIALISM

Although much less rigorous and meticulous in his economics than Kornai, György Péter, the doyen of Hungarian reform-communism and

reform economics, did seriously consider, as part of his critical assessment of the Stalinist system of economic management, the status of consumers (buyers), and its ramifications in the state-socialist economic and social order.

Péter's reform ideas had been prompted and enabled by, and grown directly out of, the *rebellious 1950s*—the era of the first general crisis of state socialism. The workers' strikes and revolts in Bulgarian Plovdiv and Khaskovo (May 3, 1953), in Czechoslovakian Plzen (May 31 to June 2, 1953), and in East Berlin (June 17, 1953) touched a nerve with the Moscow leadership. As Beria gave Malenkov to understand, "what happened in Czechoslovakia could be repeated in other countries and lead to more serious undesirable consequences."¹⁰ In a series of meetings, Moscow issued emphatic recommendations that East Central Europe's communist leaders reorient their policies toward a new relationship between rulers and the ruled, including the relaxation of terror and oppression, and the abandonment of the investment mania prioritizing the development of heavy industry at the expense of consumption, living standards, and agriculture. These policies, often referred to at the time as the New Course, received a badly needed push forward in Hungary by the direct intervention of the Moscow leadership in major personal decisions: during the Hungarian leaders' visit to Moscow, June 13–16, 1953, they decided that Imre Nagy, sidelined by Mátyás Rákosi in 1949, should assume the position of prime minister. Although Rákosi and his hardline followers remained in positions of power and put up a fight, with temporary success in 1955, New Course policies held sway from that point on, preparing the ground for the reform policies of the 1960s.

As president of the Central Statistical Office, György Péter contributed substantially to an increasingly critical assessment of the Stalinist system of macro- and micro-economic management in a long series of highly classified papers in the early 1950s.¹¹ He went public with a devastating indictment of this economic order for the first time in a "debate article" in the newly (re-) launched *Közgazdasági Szemle* (*Economic Review*) in December 1954.¹² There has been a fair number of publications on Péter's essays of the 1950s and later, and also on his contributions to the ideas underlying the economic reforms and reform economics of the 1960s.¹³ Here, I wish to focus on what he wrote about the consumer.

Péter thought it important to take a step beyond what was soon to become the "standard list" of critical complaints against the Stalinist system of economic management: the arguments against excessive centralization in decision-making; the overwhelming predominance of bureaucratic coordination of all economic transactions; and, in general, the suppression of the "law of value" (i.e., of market coordination) in economic activity. Péter called the attention of his readers to the empirical observation that when Hungarian industries exported their products, they had a difficult

time getting away with poor selection, substandard quality, and/or high costs and prices (which explains why, especially in the post-1956 world, the term “exportból visszamaradt” [remainder of export goods] meant relatively high, almost “Western” quality consumer goods and pretty good luck for the shoppers who could get them). By contrast, he wrote:

Domestic consumers are weak to assert their demands. This is the main reason for the sub-standard quality and poor selection of goods and for the disappointing development of production costs. . . . *The workers—consumers—can hardly ever choose; they have no leverage [over the producers], for the supply of goods is poor even in terms of quantities.* Part of the consumption goods can seldom be acquired and only at the cost of great effort. . . . Under such circumstances *the consumer is at the mercy of the retailers and, eventually, of the industrial companies producing the consumer goods; s/he is forced to make do with goods of inferior quality, offered at high prices.*¹⁴

Thus, Péter’s argument was that a functioning market was necessary, not for its own sake but for the emancipation of the consumer—indeed, for the creation of the autonomous consumer citizen: “To ensure that the work of producer companies could indeed be controlled by those affected (the consumers or, in general, the buyers), it is necessary that those whose . . . needs are satisfied by production should not be exposed to those who are supposed to serve them.”¹⁵

And he hastened to add:

One of the main preconditions for setting the relationship between producers and consumers (sellers and buyers) right is to have, in the sought-after quality and selection, *the appropriate amount of consumer goods in demand.* . . . Whether the quality of the consumer goods . . . is as it should be can only be decided by consumers. . . . The satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the consumers . . . with regard to quality and selection, on the other hand, can assert itself institutionally only if they can freely decide whether they [wish to] buy the goods offered or which product out of a selection of similar goods they want to buy.¹⁶

In other words, in the early ideas of economic reforms, the autonomous consumer—acquiring agency in a new socialist economic order that combined planning and market with the generation of a sustained glut of goods (supply in excess of effective demand)—went hand in hand with, and were premised on, each other. The move toward market socialism, the emergence of the emancipated consumer free to make choices, and a sustained supply-side abundance were thus but three sides of the same coin, even though they weren’t emphasized equally—and they remained at the core of the reform-communist economic credo all the way to the final demise of the state-socialist project. The autonomous consumer

as an organic part of the ideal economic world envisioned by reform-communists was confirmed, among others, by the chief architect of economic reforms, Rezső Nyers himself. At a meeting with board members of the Hungarian Alliance of Technological and Scientific Associations (MTESZ), Nyers responded to a question about insufficient imports of private cars by saying: "It might easily happen that life will sideline our plans and there will be a faster development. The general experience is that the will of the consumer supersedes the plans of the state. We have to yield to and follow the consumer."¹⁷

The demise of state socialism in 1989 has, of course, a highly complex explanation and cannot be reduced merely to the failure of reform-communist policies. Even so, it is important to observe that the changes occurring over the course of the 1960s did include the birth of the consumer citizen and some half-hearted steps toward an economic domain in which planning and market are integrated. The "New Economic Mechanism," however, never succeeded in generating supply-side abundance.

What, in fact, the long decade following 1956 brought with it was *consumerism*. Consumerism defined as values and desires, patterns of behavior focused on satisfying an acquisitive lust that defines, as it were, the meaning of life,¹⁸ does not presuppose the presence of abundance as it was known from contemporary Western affluent or consumer societies. Nor is it conditional upon the presence of corporations that manipulate consumers as Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger are trying to maintain: "Consumerism . . . generally assumes a society that is driven and mobilized by marketing and corporate strategies that stimulate and then fulfill ever more unquenchable desires."¹⁹ By tying the phenomenon "consumerism" to capitalism (after all, a "socialist society" is certainly not "driven and mobilized by marketing and corporate strategies"), Bren and Neuburger's definition of consumerism steals back into the discussion the systemic relativism²⁰ characteristic of the master discourse of the state-socialist regimes of the Cold War era. Their suggestion that "consumption" is a better because "neutral" category with which to approach the non-capitalist ("second" and "third") world is a typical "socialist realist" claim that closes the issue of "consumerism under socialism" before it could even be articulated. For tactical reasons, leading reform-oriented economists too had to place their discussions within the frames of the master discourse of systemic relativism. As an illustration for this, let us look at the way they argued for the use of market research in a socialist economy:

The laws and tendencies of the socialist economy—such as the maximal satisfaction of human needs, the immediate relationship between production and consumption, the dual nature of commodity, and the principle of [income] distribution along work performance—all require the careful and

regular study of consumer demand. . . . Capitalist marketing research . . . is driven by the efforts of entrepreneurs to be able to sell their products, even in recession, without interruptions. . . . The objective of socialist marketing, however, is to correctly understand consumer demand and the factors shaping it, to satisfy needs better.²¹

Although it can be of genuine interest to study the various normative (ideological and/or political) attempts to tame, restrict, and/or harness consumerism under socialism, these attempts in no way justify intellectual strategies that place an iron curtain between capitalism and state socialism. After the revolutionary experiment geared to building up an authentic socialist everyday life from below in Soviet Russia of the 1920s and the short-lived Khrushchevian experiment at the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, which purported to modernize Soviet everyday life from above, the history of state socialism in the 1960s and after was a history of a more or less planned and deliberate withdrawal from the earlier ideas of creating a “socialist lifestyle” or the “Socialist Man” (*Homo Sovieticus*) and of a gradual surrender to the forces of consumerism.

We will, later on in this book, dwell in greater detail upon the reasons why, in terms of lifestyle, the project of a state-socialist *Sonderweg* was given up and Western patterns were yielded to. What needs to be emphasized here is that the suggestion is *not* that developments after Stalin turned any of Eastern Europe’s state-socialist countries into consumer societies. The consumer society as it emerged in North America and Western Europe after World War II was characterized by a sustained buyer’s market (exactly what György Péter and reform economists of the 1960s wished to achieve). The typical situation in these economies and societies is *supply-side abundance*: a systemically contingent overflow of goods and services produced and offered in excess of effective demand. By contrast, and despite the reforms of the 1960s and the 1980s, state socialism remained a centrally planned economy which was never really free from strong state paternalism, the consequent soft budget constraint, and thus the propensity to produce and reproduce shortages. The typical situation here was *demand-side abundance*: an overflow both in terms of effective demand and in terms of consumer dreams—a combination of unleashed consumerism (desires and acquisitive lust) and shortages.

Attentive minds were quick to recognize the potential or actual tensions generated in Hungarian society by demand-side abundance. Among the earliest signals was the leftist populist writer Pál Szabó’s “Literary letter” from 1960. Szabó sensed where Hungarian society had been heading and thought it could easily prove to be an alley that one did not want to go down: “The socialist world order has hardly provided a sample of everything that is possible and might become reality, and we can already see that, obviously, material welfare in itself educates the urban population as well as the provincial masses . . . to become bourgeois rather than

socialists." His short letter ended with the ominous warning: "One thing is certain—and it is that the one who goes astray in the bourgeois way of thinking will find it very hard to get onto the road towards socialism."²² The debate on *fridszider szocializmus* (*refrigerator socialism*)²³ in the early 1960s was only the beginning of a series of regular outbursts against "petit bourgeois" attitudes and behavior throughout the Kádár era. They provide evidence not so much of the existence of a systemically specific consumption culture under state socialism as of the fact that the consumerist toothpaste had been out of the tube.

Far from being confined to Hungary within the "Eastern Bloc,"²⁴ the coming of consumerism and its consolidation can be traced and shown in the mirror of its critical reception by several shades of Kádár-era Hungary's cultural and intellectual life. In the rest of this chapter, I present and discuss only two distinct streams of critical reception of the advent of consumerism and demand-side abundance in Communist Hungary. First, I present the contemporary satirical mirror held to advances of consumerism in Hungarian society by the cartoons published in the weekly satirical magazine, *Ludas Matyi*, in the first seven years of János Kádár's counter-revolutionary regime (1957–1964). I will then proceed and discuss the reception of demand-side abundance through the critical sociology of András Hegedüs and Mária Márkus.

CONSUMERS FOR EXPORT?

Ludas Matyi was a satirical weekly published throughout the postwar and Cold War eras (1945–1992). In the years after 1956, it was edited and published in offices neighboring those of the Communist Party daily, *Népszabadság*. Like its "sibling" magazines in the other state-socialist countries (such as the Soviet *Krokodil*, the Czechoslovak *Dikobraz*, GDR's *Till Eulenspiegel*, the Polish *Szpilki*, or the Bulgarian *Starshel*), it worked as the party's weekly. Institutionally, its editorial office formed part of a Central Committee department, together with *Népszabadság*—under the control of the party apparatus, of course. This inevitably implied that many aspects of social-political life were off limits to *Ludas's* satirical commentaries; one could not make fun of individual leaders of the party-state, for instance. Yet, the magazine enjoyed great popularity, as readers scrambled for copies of every issue sold by the street vendors. In spite of the extraordinarily high number of copies printed, it was difficult to obtain one by late afternoon of the day a new issue appeared.

The popularity of the magazine, which always carried considerably more cartoons than text, can hardly have been a function of the messages it conveyed from the Agitation-and-Propaganda apparatus. Besides the unavoidable politically correct material, the magazine carried many of the

cartoonists' own commentaries on the contemporary world that were not necessarily sanctioned by party authorities. Indeed, as I emphasized in an essay relying on the cartoons of this magazine,²⁵ if their bantering satire was to be efficient, the *Ludas Matyi* cartoons had to resonate with their readers' experiences in their actual lifeworld, and that is exactly the reason why the magazine was so popular.

Few better contemporary illustrations could be found for what demand-side abundance is about than the cover page of the April 21, 1960 issue of *Ludas Matyi*. (see figure 1.1)

It carries Sándor Gerő's cartoon²⁶ featuring, in the background, the entrance and exit of a department store. In the foreground, we see an



Figure 1.1. Sándor Gerő, Cartoon. Source: Title Page of *Ludas Matyi*, April 21, 1960 [Outside the Entrance of a Department Store].

impressive American car and three men. Two of the three are in a dialogue with one another—a U.S. businessman, “Mister Williams,” and a Hungarian official (perhaps from the Ministry of Foreign Trade, assigned to accompany Mr. Williams). The third man, probably Mr. Williams’s companion, looks on with goggling eyes, as if unsettled by the scene unfolding in front of them: people streaming into the department store with little expression on their faces, and the masses streaming out, many of them smiling and happy. Clinging to their purchases, they leave the store in a state of bliss. Significantly, with the exception of a few, we cannot see quite exactly what they have managed to buy. Many of the objects they hold are invisible—nondescript packages wrapped in string. What does emphatically transpire from the cartoon, however, is the joy that *acquisition* has brought them. The contrast between the faces of those entering and those exiting tells of an almost religious, transcendental experience in that departmental store. Mr. Williams understood all too well what he just saw—it was demand-side abundance—and when his Hungarian negotiating partner asked him “From a commercial point of view, what are you interested in, Mr. Williams?” the answer was instantaneous: “Several things. For example, would you consider exporting consumers too?”

The feeding frenzy evoked the American businessmen’s awe and envy. Coming from the United States, the archetype of Western consumerist civilization, they were shocked to find consumers in a Communist country more eager than their own consumers back home. David Riesman would not have been surprised, as is clearly shown in his amazing and amusing thought experiment, “The nylon war.” In this piece of scholarly fiction from 1951,²⁷ he suggested that the Cold War could be finished off with an “all-out bombing of the Soviet Union with consumers’ goods”: “if allowed to sample the riches of America, the Russian people would not long tolerate masters who gave them tanks and spies instead of vacuum cleaners and beauty parlors.”

It needs to be emphasized that Gerő’s cartoon and most of the others criticizing the consumerism that was more and more in evidence in Hungarian society had an ambiguous rather than a black-and-white relationship with what was common experience for all citizens of the country. Hungarians did not seem to mind that many people were better off and could afford to indulge in “the pleasures of shopping.” They unambiguously condemned the malfunctions of state-socialist retailing, however: the exploitation by producers (and retailers) of their monopoly position and, in general, the weak and exposed position of consumers. Many cartoons commented on the negative effects of shortages: that people had to spend hours standing in lines, the corruption (the need to pay considerable “tips” to shop assistants in order to get scarce commodities in great demand), and/or the lack of interest on the part of retailers and producers in pleasing the consumer.²⁸

One can also sense a feeling of relief that the “ascetic” Rákosi era had been left behind, as Tibor Kaján’s quip illuminates rather well. His cartoon “At the lottery of Peace Bonds”²⁹ requires some explanation. In accordance with the Soviet (Stalinist) “model,” working people were expected to devote part of their incomes to buying so-called Peace Bonds in Hungary. These were state obligations, and their point was to force the population to save a chunk of their meager salaries and wages to promote the objectives of the Stalinist accumulation mania (increasing the share in the national income of investments at the expense of consumption). Failing to subscribe regularly to the Peace Bonds was considered a hostile act and could have dire consequences. After 1956, no new Peace Bonds were issued, but their amortization took longer—well into the 1960s. The debt of the state was settled in part by a lottery, whereby the lucky owner of a bond with the number that came up could receive somewhat more than the original price of the bond. Kaján’s cartoon shows one of these Peace-Bond lotteries, where one man waiting for the results says to another: “If I win, I am happy because I won, if I don’t win, I am happy, because I no longer have to subscribe to new bonds.”

Nevertheless, the cartoonists also seemed to believe that consumerism brought worrisome tendencies along with it. In general, they were concerned about the perversion of human values: the disproportionate significance that things would assume in people’s lives—people’s fixation with goods, in general, and with certain “iconic objects” of consumer desire, in particular (fetishism). In Russian (Soviet) parlance, this was called *veshchism*, which had the connotations of “materialism,” “consumerism,” or “excessive devotion to material objects.”³⁰ Perverted hierarchies of preferences were found to be disturbing too—hierarchies that manifested themselves by people proving ready to deny themselves and their families the most elementary needs in order to acquire or carefully maintain a precious object, such as a private car.

As objects of desire started filling the shop windows, the lust to acquire them grew, as shown by Tibor Kaján’s cartoon, “Humans are steered by their desires.”³¹ The desire and will to acquire things—the ownership of which seemed to become the norm and the necessary means to project, establish, or reproduce social status—appeared to be a ubiquitous tendency. In another of Tibor Kaján’s cartoons,³² a husband and wife are sweating, while literally prying out of Fortune’s cornucopia the prime objects of consumer desire: a refrigerator, washing machine, television set, and finally, the crown on a consuming life, the private car (see figure 1.2).

As another work of Kaján³³ suggests, the new consumerist era’s hero worship places on a pedestal the person who has succeeded in getting it all (see figure 1.3). With the posture of a proud general after a battle won, the hero stands on top of his major acquisitions—the car, the refrigerator, the

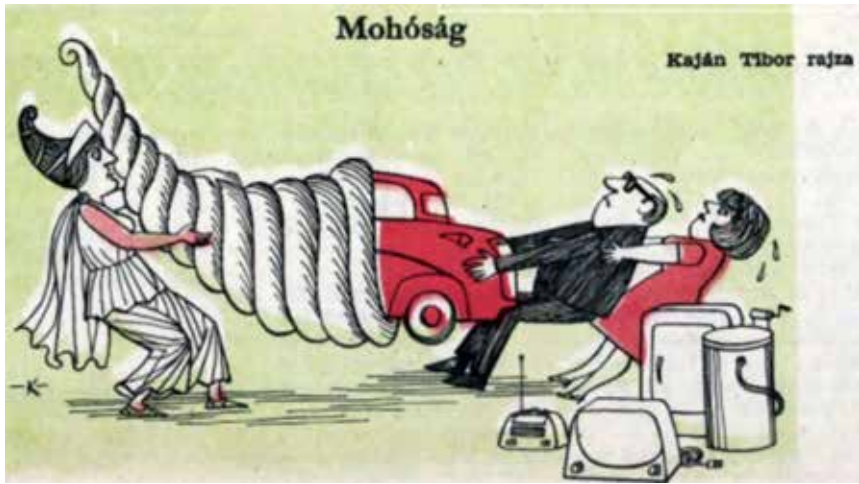


Figure 1.2. Tibor Kaján. Source: Cartoon Titled “Greed,” *Ludas Matyi*, May 16, 1963.

television set, and a washing machine—and the monument is surrounded by worshippers standing in awe, with hats off, to pay their respects. No doubt they are trying to prove good disciples of their source of inspiration.

Radically changing norms and values were the focus of István Hegedűs’s “Family album.”³⁴

He showed (see figure 1.4) how, in two generations, love for, and pride in, one’s children and grandchildren is replaced by love for, and pride in, the acquisitions of a modern married couple who live on their own, have no children, but are the happy owners of a car, a vacuum cleaner, a washing machine, a television set, and a magnetophone (reel-to-reel recorder). A similar commentary on the emergence and growth of an acquisitive society is László Réber’s work,³⁵ although the family in this case included children. Resonating with these cartoons was what grew through the 1960s to become a standard topos or something like a genre of its own: bantering the “*kicsi vagy kocsi?*” (shall we get a baby or a car?) dilemma.³⁶ No doubt, the popularity of this topos among cartoonists was due to the particular force with which it revealed how demand-side abundance drove people to negotiate (and oppress) their most natural and traditional needs and values (such as love, getting children, and the cultivation of familial ties), for the benefit of satisfying their acquisitive lust.

István Hegedűs was among the first to notice the paradoxical phenomenon that “gadgets of the day” would make their way into Hungarian households in some cases long before all other basic needs had been taken care of. In his acerbic comment on the new, consumerist understanding of the concept of “Civilization,”³⁷ we see a shanty town of dwellings

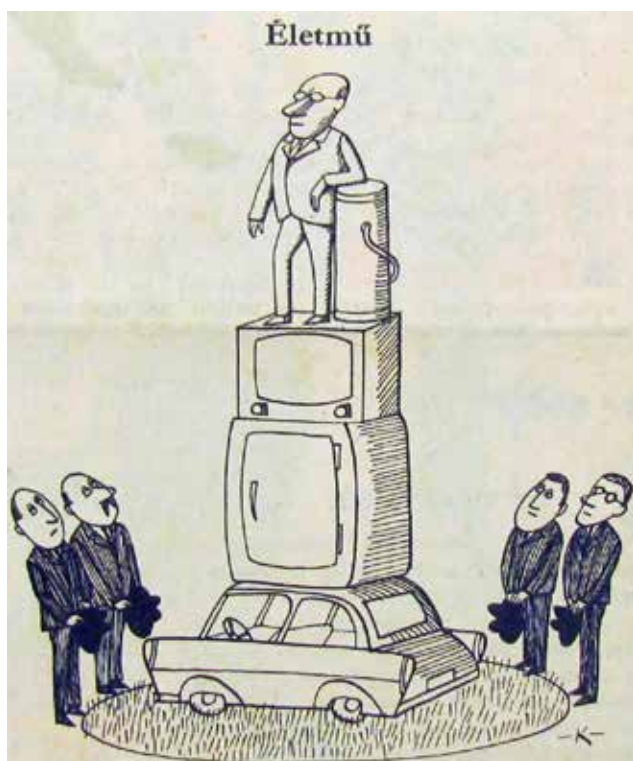


Figure 1.3. Tibor Kaján. Source: Cartoon Titled "Lifework," *Ludas Matyi*, November 7, 1963.

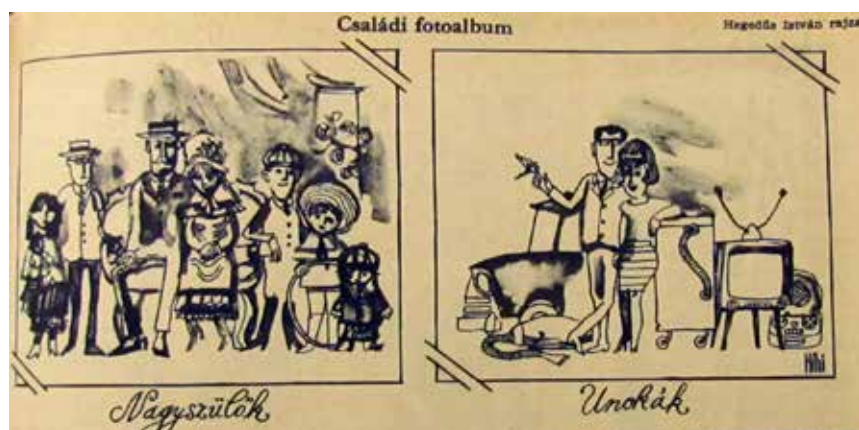


Figure 1.4. István Hegedűs. Source: Cartoon Titled "Family album," *Ludas Matyi*, March 5, 1964.

improvised out of whatever materials happened to be at hand—they have no running water, and the roofs can hardly withstand the weather, but all are adorned with a TV antenna (see figure 1.5).

Indeed, the second half of the 1950s and early 1960s saw a sudden mushrooming of one of the main objects of desire: television. Having a TV became a matter of social status and reputation (one of the defining phenomena attendant to consumerism), as reported also by József Szűr-Szabó in a cartoon in which father and son, putting the finishing touches on the newly built family house, erect an antenna on the roof, saying, “The neighbors will go cuckoo with envy . . . believing that [not only have we built a new house, but] we even have a TV-set.”³⁸ Another work of Szűr-Szabó addresses the same issue, using the Leninist concept of “uneven development” as the title of the cartoon.³⁹ It depicts a couple inhabiting a minimalist house; although they own all that belongs to a “modern household,” they are forced to place their television set, washing machine, and refrigerator outside for lack of space within.

Trips abroad were one of the typical situations in which the “socialist consumer,” driven by the passion to acquire, was caught, and revealed. Such travel enabled the consumer to acquire things unavailable at home, or not available in a broad enough selection or qualities, or at accessible prices. Smuggling, selling, and buying goods abroad hence all came to be present during visits to other socialist countries or to the West, as András Mészáros’ cartoon “Hungarian tourists abroad” registered. Of a large group of tourists, only one, named Kerekes, seems to be interested in the impressive sights offered by the city visited. The others are buying,



Figure 1.5. István Hegedűs. Source: Cartoon Titled “Civilization,” *Ludas Matyi*, May 9, 1957.

selling, and exchanging cameras, watches, salami, and underwear. One of these peddlers tells the other, “I don’t understand this Kerekes—why on earth would he come abroad to waste his whole day on sightseeing?”⁴⁰

Lucky were those who could travel more often and with a *per diem* in their pockets, thanks to their jobs. Tibor Töncz’s work shows (see figure 1.6) one of these happy travelers, explaining to his compatriot why he is sleeping under the bridge: “You know, I am still saving for a magnetophone and a small car!”⁴¹

Assignments abroad of more than a few weeks (especially in the West) could even enable the purchase of a car. A review of the “Problems attendant to Hungarian–U.S. cultural relations” by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1966 bitterly reports that among Hungarian scholars receiving Ford Fellowships, only a minority used their stipends to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the United States or to acquire scientific literature and equipment. Most of them set aside even the grant earmarked for purchasing books to be able to buy a car at the end of their term. “[With the same objective in mind,] some of them save to an extent that is detrimental to proper nutrition”⁴²; that is, they didn’t eat enough, and they ate mostly junk food.⁴³

Just as the consumerist world presents a hierarchy of goods, so the wider world outside of one’s own country was seen in terms of a hierarchy of places arranged by shopping opportunities, beginning, at the

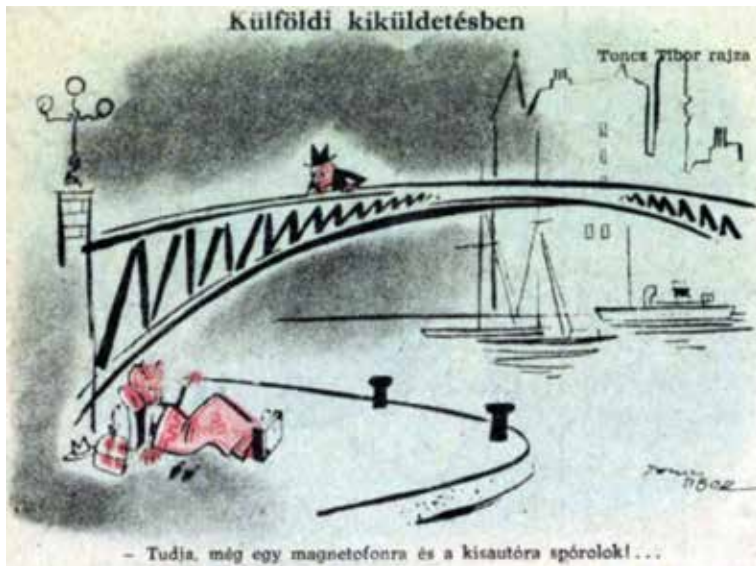


Figure 1.6. Tibor Töncz. Source: Cartoon Titled “On assignment abroad,” *Ludas Matyi*, June 12, 1958.

lowest level, with the other socialist countries, and ending on the peaks constituted by the countries of the West. Joking about “adoration of the West” (*Nyugat-imádat*), therefore, became one of the favorite occupations of the *Ludas* cartoonists. Gizi Szegő showed a clumsy waiter emptying the contents of a bowl of red (sour cherry?) soup into the lap of an elegant lady. As she is leaving the posh restaurant with plenty of red spots on her dress, another woman, passing by, remarks: “What a beautiful pattern! No doubt, it must be from Paris.”⁴⁴ Tibor Tonzc depicted a husband arriving from the West and disembarking from the train. He has a red nose and a handkerchief at the ready. His wife, waiting for him on the platform, anxiously asks “Have you caught the flu?” to which he responds with a proud and triumphant smile, “Not only that, but an original Western one!”⁴⁵ The same strings are touched by Sándor Erdei’s cartoon, in which a Hungarian tourist couple stand on a sidewalk in London, mesmerized. Their jaws dropped at the sight of the overwhelming traffic. The husband explains to his wife: “This is something, you see!? Our traffic jam doesn’t even come close to this!”⁴⁶

The emergence and growth of an “acquisitive society”⁴⁷ and of fetishistic attitudes toward commodities hence appear to have been the feature that Hungarian cartoonists found most troubling and that figured most frequently in their work. The impressive wealth of cartoons thematizing this issue during the relatively short period observed here corroborates this notion beyond doubt.⁴⁸

Similarly to the cartoonists, the advent of consumerism and the phenomena engendered by demand-side abundance were obviously noticed, studied, and discussed by sociologists as well.

CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY AND THE ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY

In the opinion of those approaching the consumerism of the 1960s and 1970s from a scholarly platform, there was a bright side to the tendency. For example, Márta Nagy of the Hungarian Institute for Public Opinion Research believed that the obsession with things “democratized” the understanding of what it meant to be rich. Her representative survey (N = 784), conducted in 1973, asked the question “Who are the rich?” and allowed entirely free responses with no limits to the length of the response or to the number of explanatory motives it could include. Content analysis revealed the most frequent motive among the responses to be the acquisition of durable goods (41%). Thus, when identifying rich and poor in society, Hungarian respondents in the mid-1970s differentiated them in terms of the quantity and quality of durables acquired, rather than by social class and strata (28%).⁴⁹

Others, like Tamás Szecskő, director of the institute where Márta Nagy worked, came to think of a darker side of this issue when asked (by high-level party authorities, probably in preparation for the XI Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party in March 1975) to produce a forecast of "The ideological-political problems of our society" over the coming 15 years. In his first draft, Szecskő predicted a strengthening of "individualistic orientation toward consumption; [and] growing doubts as to the [possible] emergence, [or even] the need for a socialist type of morality."⁵⁰ But before finalizing and sending off his text, Szecskő asked for the comments of two highly influential personalities of the time: Iván T. Berend, rector of the Karl Marx University of Economics, and Imre Pozsgay, deputy chief editor of the party's theoretical journal, *Társadalmi Szemle*. Berend jotted his comments by hand onto Szecskő's draft—and on the passage quoted from the document above, he wrote in the margin:

This is all very one-sided! . . . the inverse of these problems will also present themselves. . . . what is predictable: [is] "anti-economism" turning against the "growth orientation," . . . social models starting out from "moral" platforms, demands for a socialist structure of consumption in forms torn off realities. . . . [as for the "individualist orientation toward consumption"] . . . reactions can be expected too: the other side of "petit bourgeois [tendencies]": namely asceticist-anarchistic revolutionism, hostility toward "consumption," egalitarianism, and strong collectivist tendencies among the young.

There is a complex background to Berend's remarks, with an obvious, sharp edge toward the Left. For one thing, the date is just about a short year after the so-called Philosophers' Trial, a political-ideological purge directed against a circle of social theorists (like Ágnes Heller, György Márkus, and Mihály Vajda) and critical sociologists (like Mária Márkus and András Hegedüs), a circle often referred to as the Budapest (or Lukács) School. Here, I have to render the story in a nutshell. Hungarian reform Communism was facing a conservative backlash after the invasion of reform-communist Czechoslovakia in August 1968. To save themselves and their achievements, and to show Moscow that they were still on the ball and had control over ideological-political developments at home, they decided to take the initiative and deliver a blow to what was considered to have been a New Leftist tendency in Budapest intellectual life: critical sociology and its background in critical Marxist social theory (as cultivated particularly by Ágnes Heller and György Márkus). By May 1973, seven scholars had been excluded from the party (if they had still been members at the time) and from their academic jobs. In 1975, as a result of their joblessness and of deliberate "nudging" by the state security police, Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, György and Mária Márkus left Hungary for the West. Sociologist Iván Szelényi soon joined them—he

was forced to leave on account of his book (written in Hungary, together with György Konrád, in 1973–1974, published in the West in 1979), *The Intellectuals' Road to Class Power*.⁵¹

Indeed, Berend's comments on Szecskő's draft strongly resonated with the official accusations against these critical sociologists and social theorists. Their close intellectual and personal relationship to Western New Left ideologues, their alleged condemnation of the economic reforms as a retreat to capitalism, and their uncritical adoration of various Western forms of collectivism from below, such as the hippie communes, and so on, were the main criticisms leveled against them by the agit-prop establishment of the party-state.⁵²

In the wake of Brezhnev's Thermidor (from August 1968 onward), the positions of reform-communist politicians and policies and the positions of the so-called reform economists came under siege by the conservative-communist network in the party-state's higher- and lower-level apparatuses. Even though critical social theory and sociology had nothing to do with this conservative backlash, from a reform-communist point of view, they came to be treated under the same umbrella as the reform-communists' conservative challengers. In fact, in terms of their hostility toward critical theory, conservative and reform-communists joined forces.⁵³

Tamás Szecskő's first draft and its prediction, then, were no doubt inspired by the works of András Hegedüs and Mária Márkus.⁵⁴ Critical sociology was Hegedüs's professional credo. He believed that the role of social science scholarship in a socialist society was not merely to provide instrumental knowledge to those in power and to help people, in general, to understand things social. Also, and most important, it should critically assess the direction in which political, social, and economic developments were taking the country in light of the professed values and visions that were supposed to be informing the socialist project.⁵⁵ Having been a socialist himself, Hegedüs emphasized, the idea of socialism had never been to enable the development of only the productive forces but of the "the many-sided rehumanization of social relations." Although he understood how important it was to achieve dynamic growth through "marketizing" reforms, he wanted to raise a finger of warning lest "optimization" (economic growth) should compromise and squeeze out the objectives of "humanization" from the socialist agenda.⁵⁶ His hope was that "the times are not far away when the advantages of socialism over capitalism are measured not in terms of the growth of material-economic indices, but in terms of the humanization of social relations, when the decisive fact will be the existence of the possibility for the human personality to develop."⁵⁷ But, as Hegedüs also emphasized:

Material affluence does not lead automatically to the broadening of the possibilities of human self-realization. . . . we [socialist societies] still tend to be

enchanted by economism and to be inclined to prove the high development level of our social system exclusively by the successes we think we achieved or desire to achieve in the economic sphere.

He warned that, on the platform of the same economism, “it appears more and more as if the only civilizational path available for the further development of our society were that of the Western highly developed industrial societies in the past and the present.”⁵⁸ Although Hegedüs had no quarrel with the basic ideas of reform economists, with their wish to dynamize economic growth by increasing the role of the market at the expense of bureaucratic coordination, he did object to turning economic growth into a “value” (something to be pursued for its own sake). That was why he and his colleague, Mária Márkus, insisted on the need to define a civilization model different from that of the West, in that it would enable the values of humanization to be asserted.

With the contours of this new civilization in mind, he and Mária Márkus were offered the opportunity to undertake a critical assessment of the work of the Committee for Long-Term Planning of Labor Force and Living Standards in 1968–1969.⁵⁹ Hegedüs and Márkus were all too aware of the pull exercised by the soft power without:

In long-term planning, one must account for the system of values prevalent in society, in its various strata and for the ongoing changes of these values, as they will largely define the aspirations, needs, and, consequently, the structure of consumption of this society. In shaping the latter, the consumption model of more developed societies plays a role, in that it affects the mind of the people as a desirable pattern of civilization. The intensity of this effect will be partly a function of the extent to which socialist societies become open, which is an ongoing process that is impossible to stop, thanks to the fast development of the means of mass communication. The other factor influencing the intensity of the [demonstration] effect is the capability of socialist societies to posit their own model against [Western civilization], a model that preserves and includes the true values and achievements of [Western] civilization but rejects the idea of taking on board the distortions of the Western consumption models caused by manipulation.⁶⁰

Without pretending that they knew exactly what the “socialist model of civilization” and, within it, consumption, should look like, Hegedüs and Márkus did not hesitate to spell out some fundamental distinctions and criteria relevant to the model. They believed that it was not only necessary but also possible to develop a systemically specific, socialist model of consumption. To achieve that model, they believed that not only income distribution but also needs and the ways in which needs were satisfied had to be actively influenced. They suggested that any discussion of a socialist model of consumption required the distinction between basic

and aspirational (or differentiated) needs. Although both types of needs were informed and shaped by the general level of economic development, basic needs were such that their satisfaction had to be secured for everybody in society. Hegedüs and Márkus asserted that, in the second half of the 1960s, healthy diet, clothing, housing, and cultural and educational opportunities, independent of and unlimited by one's income and wealth, should be regarded as basic needs, and they hoped it could be possible to secure them for all citizens of socialist Hungary within 15 to 20 years. In an even longer term perspective, however, they believed that aspirational needs would assume an increasingly prominent role. Aspirational needs represent consumption over and above the level of basic needs or ways of satisfying basic needs, but in a non-standard manner (e.g., to have a roof over one's head is a basic need, but satisfying the basic need for housing by buying a 400-square-meter villa in one of the most appealing green areas of the city is no doubt catering to aspirational needs).

Hegedüs and Márkus did recognize that aspirational needs had a legitimate place in a socialist society, as their satisfaction was important for the many-sided development of personality, for catering to individual expressivity, individual variation in needs and taste. But they also realized that, in stratified societies, differentiated needs tend to become attached to social position and status, generating consumption considered to be appropriate for, and proportionate to, the imagined or desired prestige. As they observed,

in societies where, on account of significant shortages and/or the relatively low level of national income, broader masses are unable to buy commodities they would otherwise wish to obtain, prestige consumption is primarily focused on commodities not accessible to the masses. As the abundance of commodity supplies increase, living standards become higher, prestige consumption will target different types of the same commodities and, thus, objects performing by and large the same function will be produced in strongly differentiated "classes," satisfying not merely individualized needs, but needs springing from status orientation. This tendency affects such services as luxury shops and high-class restaurants as well, of course.⁶¹

Their socialist model of consumption could therefore include efforts to satisfy individualized needs serving the many-sided development of personality, but not status-oriented, prestige consumption.

From the point of view of my discussion, the key observation is the awareness among critical sociologists of the presence and significance of demand-side abundance. In a presentation written for a conference on industrial sociology, Hegedüs formulated the problem in this manner: "the prevailing situation [in our society] is that the desire in people for commodities and services belonging in this category [the category of

aspirational needs] grows faster than the rate at which society can meet these needs effectively.”⁶²

This type of discussion received a further nudge from economist Éva Ehrlich, rightly famous for her work on the methodology of international and inter-systemic comparative studies of macro-economic structures and performance. Based on her calculations to show the co-relation between the level of economic development (per capita GDP) and the size of personal consumption (in terms of its share in the GDP), Ehrlich made the interesting observation that, “in general, the gap in terms of personal consumption between countries, both with regard to capitalist and with regard to socialist countries, tends to be smaller than the gap in terms of levels of economic development.”⁶³ Ehrlich’s summary of the differences between the economic development of Hungary and the economic development of the United States, Sweden, and the Federal Republic of (West) Germany in 1965 are shown in table 1.1.

Ehrlich’s data and inter- and intra-systemic comparisons reveal that a highly potent international and transsystemic demonstration effect (one of the most powerful sources of demand-side abundance) has been, in general, part of the relationship between the developed core and those lagging behind in the world system—all the way to the periphery. As she modestly put it, “That this tendency asserts itself [so generally], is certainly to some extent due to the emerging intertwining of economies within and across the regions of the world.”⁶⁴

In their chapter for the International Sociological Conference on Modernization at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, June 11–18, 1972,⁶⁵ Hegedüs and Márkus further elaborated on this aspect and its ramifications in terms of the “consumption model” and consumerism under state socialism. Indeed, they devoted a whole chapter to “the impact of the consumption model of acquisitive society upon needs.” Their starting point was articulated in the following manner: “Today, partly because of the development of mass communications and partly because

Table 1.1. Personal Consumption and Economic Development of Hungary Compared to the United States, Sweden, and the Federal Republic of (West) Germany (FRG) in 1965

	<i>Hungary/USA</i>	<i>Hungary/Sweden</i>	<i>Hungary/FRG</i>
GDP per capita	1:4.5	1:3.3	1:2.4
Personal Consumption (as a %age of GDP)	1:3.8	1:2.7	1:2.2

Source: Éva Ehrlich, “A gazdasági fejlettség és a személyes fogyasztás színvonala nemzetközi összehasonlításban” [The level of economic development and personal consumption in international comparison], *Közgazdasági Szemle*, XVII (10), October 1970, pp. 1176–1177.

countries are less closed than they used to be (i.e., the world is increasingly becoming an open system), the influence exerted by the highly developed countries upon the other societies, among them the European socialist countries, is becoming greater and greater every year.”⁶⁶ They observed that consumption patterns prevalent in highly developed (capitalist) societies exercise a particularly strong influence upon the semi-developed socialist countries. Because of the relatively low living standards in these socialist countries, needs are generated that can be met only partially and at the cost of perverting the structure of consumption, leading people to sacrifice the satisfaction of some of the basic needs of their families and themselves. This perversion hits particularly hard in the lower strata, in which people, reaching out for the latest commonly pursued objects of desire, tend to omit from their consumption several “transitional” civilizational achievements (things having to do with personal hygiene and a higher comfort level of housing—like running hot water).⁶⁷

As one concrete instantiation of the anomalies in consumption generated by Western patterns of an acquisitive society in Hungary, Hegedüs and Márkus mentioned a paradox: while less than 40% of Hungarian households had running water inside their accommodation, more than 50% of them owned a washing machine. Major survey research conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Békés County found that 20% of the families living at a level under the statistically established existence minimum owned or were planning within the near future to buy a washing machine. The same measure was up to 60% among those living one level higher, but still in poverty.⁶⁸

These scholars also underlined the force with which the acquisitive model of consumption was asserted, given the aspirational needs generated. These needs were not only about use values but were also expressive and projective of the illusions and hopes for a higher social status among members of certain strata. The characteristic examples of commodities the acquisition of which was allegedly motivated by the consumerist model of consumption of the developed capitalist countries are clothing, television, and private cars. Fashionable and “correct” clothing can cost a great deal, and yet it is the cheapest way of projecting not only one’s actual but also wished-for social status, material situation, individual and familial success and may therefore promote (or undermine) social integration. The research in Békés County found that parents would often accept serious economic sacrifices and allow their adult, actively working children to live with them at no cost, in order to enable them to clothe themselves “appropriately.”⁶⁹ Even in state-socialist societies, the car was an iconic object of consumerism. There were plenty of instances of the serious economic overstretch that consumer families were driven into by their acquisitive lust.⁷⁰

Hegedüs and Márkus concluded their discussion by revealing that the seeming historical choice was between the classic, Stalinist, “public administration model” of socialism and the “main road model.” Following the “main road” meant market-oriented reforms and the recognition that socialist societies, if they were ever to catch up with the highly developed West, would have to allow Western patterns of consumption, the “consumption model of acquisitive society,” to assert themselves. The authors admitted that the main road model would serve the dynamization of the economy more consistently and efficiently and, because of that dynamization, engender improvements in living standards. Within certain limits, they conceded, it might even promote democratization. But they warned that the main road model, “even though it might not restore the private ownership of the means of production, would lead to an acquisitive type of profit-oriented society.”⁷¹ They feared that road would lead to the demise of the socialist project.

This anxiety over the fate of the socialist project was shared by some professionals and intellectuals in the country. In 1969, the Committee for Long-Term Planning of Labor Force and Living Standards of the Central Planning Office published its “Working Hypotheses” for what was meant to become Hungary’s 15-year plan for 1970–1985.⁷² Through that publication, the committee wished to invite the broader informed public to comment on their hypotheses. Showing how sincere they were in their intent to secure feedback, they even took the step of sending the hypotheses to 209 people from various walks of life, with an accompanying letter asking for their opinion. They were sent to such intellectuals and professionals as economists, engineers, physicians, social scientists, writers, and publicists, as well as to people from the party-state’s apparatus class, that is, to politicians and public and economic administrators in leadership positions. They eventually managed to receive 71 responses, which the eminent sociologist Zsuzsa Ferge was asked to process and analyze. In her report, Ferge relates and quotes Respondent 58, with obvious sympathy and agreement:

According to [this respondent] the main issue is not whether or not we will be able to perform the planned growth—it is, rather, what it means if we will? . . . even at an optimal growth rate, the gap between us and the most developed capitalist countries will increase. . . . i.e., at the end of the long-term plan’s period, our place within the general tendency of “rich getting richer and poor getting poorer” will be in the latter category. This will mean, according to the letter’s writer, “decent and struggling poverty,” and this is what we should prepare our society for in education, literature, and popular enlightenment, . . . trying to make it understood . . . that while starvation and pauperism are an unacceptable state of things to be put an end to, decent “poverty” can be the fundament of a worthier and happier life than the

[Western] “welfare state.” Comparisons with highly developed capitalist countries are misleading. *Socialism is a qualitatively different world.*⁷³

Too bad for the respondent that what the *Hypotheses* confirmed was the fact that state-socialism neither in terms of attitudes or mentality nor in terms of its practices succeeded in asserting itself as “a qualitatively different world” regarding everyday life. Rather, it constituted *part* of a modern world which in many respects remained to be dominated and shaped by its dynamic core or by what the hypotheses described as the “highly developed” (capitalist) societies. No doubt, however, that state socialism was a *distinct* part of this global order, with a number of typical overstretch—like its over-dimensioned research and development sector,⁷⁴ or what we have just seen, an oversized share (relative to the GDP per capita produced) of personal consumption. Such sustained imbalances are inevitable corollaries of the state-socialist social order *and* of relative backwardness or underdevelopment. They tend to be generated and sustained either deliberately by the state-socialist system as it centralizes and maximizes all resources in the hands of the state in the belief this secures the fastest road to modernity; and/or they arise in underdeveloped and semi-developed peripheral societies, where modernization and integration in the global order tends to result in a faster growth in consumer needs and desires (due to the demonstrations effects exercised by the highly developed core societies) than the growth of the GDP would warrant and could satisfy.⁷⁵ This latter is exactly the phenomenon that the calculations of Éva Ehrlich laid bare on an aggregate level.

Our survey of the discourses of critical reception of consumerism in Hungary yields a number of significant observations. First of all, it corroborates the headway made by a consumerist culture in Hungarian society from the second half of the 1950s and into the long 1960s. It has also enabled me to point out some specific aspects of demand-side abundance (a systemically contingent overflow of consumer needs and desires in excess of and beyond the constraints of resources at the household level and the national-economy level). Demand-side abundance is triggered by consumerism under the conditions of the state-socialist socio-economic order. Its typical manifestations are the “distortions of the structure of consumption,” as the critical sociologists put it or, in other words, the ubiquitous overstretch characterizing consumer behavior. I have also shown that consumerism, demand-side abundance, and their ramifications in the state-socialist socio-economic order evoked highly complex reactions from contemporary observers and commentators. These reactions were characterized by ambiguity. People welcomed the steps toward the emancipation (indeed, the creation) of the consumer citizen, toward recognizing people’s right to seeking, working for, and

enjoying what they understood to be a “good life,” toward market-oriented reforms that also held out hope for achieving a higher dynamism of economic–technological development and for securing higher living standards. But several tendencies that attended the advent of consumerism and demand-side abundance were feared, lamented about, and/or sharply critiqued: the sway of acquisitive lust over people, the fetishist adoration of commodities (especially of the prime objects of consumer desire), the erosion of some fundamental humanistic values, perverted hierarchies of preferences or priorities, and increasing social inequalities.

Many and various types of commentators on modern society (social science scholars, ideologues, journalists, urban planners, architects, home economists, and also writers, cartoonists, or cabaret artists) all over the world shared these fears for a very long time. For example, one of the central concerns for the professionals, intellectuals, and politicians promoting the Tapiola housing project outside Helsinki, Finland, was exactly the expectation that with the progress of postwar reconstruction and increasing living standards, social developments in Finland would to an all-too-great extent be steered by consumerism rather than by Ebenezer Howard’s, Lewis Mumford’s, Patrick Geddes’ and their contemporary Finnish followers’ ideas about a good (healthy, cultured, well-balanced) life.⁷⁶ Afraid of an “abundance” that would be detrimental in human-societal terms, they began the Tapiola project “as an anti-urban, anti-consumerist and anti-individualistic utopia in the 1940s.” But by the 1970s, Tapiola had developed “into an urban, consumerist and individualistic community, heavily reliant on private transport. . . . In a sense we can say that utopian plans to create new types of citizens were never realized.”⁷⁷

Just as demand-side abundance (consumerism) manifested itself on the Eastern side of the Cold War divide, these fears, too, came to the socialist countries of communist Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.⁷⁸ Indeed, the anxiety here must have been even stronger for many, because what appeared to have been at stake was the well-being of the socialist-communist project itself. For whatever joys and pleasures (at least for some) may have been springing from consumerist, Western patterns of modernity, whatever satisfaction may have been engendered by leaving the horrors, deprivations, and imposed asceticism of the Stalin era behind, it was hard to suppress the systemic anxiety that many felt over the strength of “gravitation” toward late modern, capitalist civilization and the eventual demise of the dream of a socialist society. This anxiety was articulated in the most sophisticated and best-argued manner by our critical sociologists, which is why they came into the crosshairs of the last purge in the history of Hungarian communism, in which both reform-communists and conservative-communists condemned the victim, although with some disagreement about what punishment s/he deserved.

NOTES

1. Parts of this chapter based on György Péteri, "Demand-Side Abundance. On the Post-1956 Social Contract in Communist Hungary," *East Central Europe* (Brill) 43 (2016): 315–343. Used with permission.
2. János Kornai, "A hiány újratermelése" [The reproduction of shortage], *Közgazdasági Szemle* XXV, no. 9 (September 1978): 1034–1050.
3. Kritsman, L[ev] N[atánovich] (1925) *Geroicheskii Period Velikoi Russkoi Revoliutsii* [The Heroic Period of the Great Russian Revolution] (Moskva: Vsesznyiye Kommunisticheskoi Akademii, 1925), 9.
4. János Kornai, *Anti-Equilibrium: On Economic Systems Theory and the Tasks of Research* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publications Company, 1971).
5. János Kornai, *Economics of Shortage* (Amsterdam, New York, and Oxford: North-Holland Publications Company 1980).
6. Cf. Mária Lackó, "Consumer Savings and the Supply Situation," *Acta Oeconomica* 15, no. 3–4 (1982): 365–384, and Zsuzsa Kapitány, János Kornai, and Judit Szabó, "A hiány újratermelése a magyar autópiacon" [The reproduction of shortage on the Hungarian car market], *Közgazdasági Szemle* XXIX, no. 3 (March 1982): 300–324.
7. Based on the review of Kornai-reception by Ferenc Dénes, Marianna Endrész, Péter Kaderják, Ákos Valentiny, and Győző Vályogos, "'A hiány' visszhangja Keleten és Nyugaton (A recenziók tükrében)" [The reception of the *Economics of shortage* East and West (In the mirror of book reviews)], *Közgazdasági Szemle* XXXIV, no. 7–8 (July–August 1987): 888–897.
8. Ivan Szelenyi, "Recent Contributions to the Political Economy of State Socialism," *Contemporary Sociology* 14, no. 3 (May 1985): 284–287.
9. Serguei Alex Oushakine, "'Against the Cult of Things': On Soviet Productivism, Storage Economy, and Commodities with No Destination," *The Russian Review* 73 (April 2014): 198–236.
10. Christian F. Osterman, ed., *Uprising in East Germany, 1953. The Cold War, the German Question, and the First Major Upheaval Behind the Iron Curtain* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), 15ff.
11. György Péteri, "The Politics of Statistical Information and Economic Research in Communist Hungary, 1949–56," *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 2 (July 1993): 149–167.
12. György Péter, "A gazdaságosság jelentőségéről és szerepéről a népgazdaság tervszerű irányításában" [On the significance and role of economic efficiency in the planned management of the people's economy], *Közgazdasági Szemle* I, no. 3 (December 1954): 300–324.
13. László Szamuely, ed., *A magyar közgazdasági gondolat fejlődése 1954–1978: A szocialista gazdaság mechanizmusának kutatása* [The development of Hungarian economic thought 1954–1978: research on the economic mechanism of socialist economy] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó 1986) and János Árvay et al., *Egy reformközgazdász emlékére. Péter György 1903–1969* [To remember a reform economist. György Péter, 1903–1969 (Papers presented at a scholarly conference on April 24, 1992)] (Budapest: Cserépfalvi & T-Twins, 1994).

14. Péter, “A gazdaságosság jelentőségéről és szerepéről a népgazdaság tervszerű irányításában,” 309–310. Emphasis added.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 310–312. Emphasis added.

17. “Comrade Nyers responses to questions at the Board meeting of MTESZ, February 26, 1970”—Notes taken by Ottó Gadó in: Papers of Gyula Karádi, vice president of the National Office of Planning, *National Archives of Hungary* (hereafter MOL), XIX-A-16-c, Box 9, Chief Department of Long-Term Planning, 1970.

18. Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 26ff.

19. (Editorial) “Introduction” to Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, eds., *Communism Unwrapped. Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4–5.

20. On systemic relativism, see György Péteri, “Introduction,” in *Nylon Curtain. Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe*, ed. G. Péteri (Trondheim: Program on East European Cultures and Societies, “Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies” No. 18, 2006), 6.

21. József Bognár, “A szocialista keresletkutatás néhány elméleti és gyakorlati problémája” (Some theoretical and practical problems concerning socialist marketing research), *Közgazdasági Szemle* VI, no. 5 (May 1959): 457 and 460.

22. Pál Szabó, “Irodalmi levél” [Literary letter], *Alföld*, January–February 1960, 4–5.

23. Cf. János Pótó, “A kommunizmus ígérete. Sajtóviták az 1960-as években” [The promise of communism. Debates in the press during the 1960s], *História* 5–6 (1986): 26–29, and Sándor Horváth, “Csudapest és a fridgesocializmus: a fogyasztás jelentései, a turizmus és a fogyasztáskritika az 1960-as években” [Miraculous Pest and the Refrigerator Socialism: the meanings of consumption, tourism and consumption criticism during the 1960s], *Múltunk* 3 (2008): 60–83.

24. For an enlightening discussion of consumerism in the Soviet Union, see Timo Vihavainen and Elena Bogdanova, eds., *Communism and Consumerism. The Soviet Alternative to the Affluent Society* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2016).

25. György Péteri, “Streetcars of Desire: Cars and Automobility in Communist Hungary (1958–1970),” *Social History* 34, no. 1 (February 2009): 1–28.

26. Sándor Gerő, cover page, no title, *Ludas Matyi*, April 21, 1960.

27. David Riesman, (1951), “The Nylon War,” in *Abundance for What?*, ed. David Riesman (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1993), 67–79.

28. See, for example, Sándor Gerő, “Kép a jövőből” [An image from the future], *Ludas Matyi*, June 13, 1957; László Réber, “Hatásos reklám – Állami áruház – maszek kiszolgálás!” [Persuasive advertisement: State department store – but served as if you were in a private shop], *Ludas Matyi*, September 19, 1957; idem, “Áruházban” [In a department store], *Ludas Matyi*, October 24, 1957; idem, “Egyszerű családi riportkép – Beállítás nélkül” [Simple family report picture – Unarranged], *Ludas Matyi*, April 24, 1958; József Szűr-Szabó, “Békés átmenet” [Peaceful transition], *Ludas Matyi*, May 2, 1957; Tibor Toncz, “Javul a modor a pesti boltokban” [The attitude of shop assistants is improving in Budapest shops], *Ludas Matyi*, December 26, 1957; György Várnai, “A megszegyenült vesztegető” [A bribery attempt defeated], *Ludas Matyi*, November 21, 1957; Anna Vasvári, “Kereskedelmi helyzetkép” [The

state of affairs in retailing], *Ludas Matyi*, May 16, 1957; András Mészáros, “Fejlett kereskedelem” [Highly developed retailing], *Ludas Matyi*, September 5, 1967.

29. Tibor Kaján, “Békekölcsön-húzáson” [At the lottery of Peace Bonds], *Ludas Matyi*, September 25, 1957.

30. Vihavainen and Bogdanova, *Communism and Consumerism*, xix, 17, 70, and 170.

31. Tibor Kaján, “Az embert vágyai vezérlik” [Humans are steered by their desires], *Ludas Matyi*, October 29, 1959.

32. Tibor Kaján, “Mohóság” [Greed], *Ludas Matyi*, May 16, 1963.

33. Tibor Kaján, “Életmű” [Lifework]. *Ludas Matyi*, November 7, 1963.

34. István Hegedűs, “Családi fotoalbum” [Family album], *Ludas Matyi*, March 5, 1964.

35. László Réber, “Egyszerű családi riportkép – Beállítás nélkül” [Simple family report picture – Unarranged], *Ludas Matyi*, April 24, 1958.

36. Cf. Péteri, “Streetcars of Desire,” 10–11.

37. István Hegedűs, “Civilizáció” [Civilization], *Ludas Matyi*, May 9, 1957.

38. József Szűr-Szabó, “Kész a családi ház” [The family house is completed], *Ludas Matyi*, September 12, 1957.

39. József Szűr-Szabó, “Aránytalan fejlődés” [Uneven development], *Ludas Matyi*, May 21, 1959.

40. András Mészáros, “Magyar turisták külföldön” [Hungarian tourists abroad], *Ludas Matyi*, February 6, 1958.

41. Tibor Tóncz, “Külföldi kiküldetésben” [On assignment abroad], *Ludas Matyi*, June 12, 1958.

42. “Top Secret!” Note prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 12, 1966. Prepared in 8 numbered copies, Nr. 31/PJ/1966. MOL, Papers of the Department of Science and Public Education of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, MOL, M-KS-288-34/1966/ 1. öe.

43. Before leaving Hungary for good in 1980, I spent 4 years at the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as a junior research scholar. A senior colleague of mine, who was the head of a section as well as the secretary of the Institute’s party organization, returning from the Federal Republic of Germany where he spent an academic year as a visiting research fellow thanks to a grant received from the University of Mainz, proudly told us, younger colleagues of his, how he managed to bring together what was needed to buy a little used Volkswagen Beetle by eating only canned food and salami he brought with him from Hungary.

44. Gizi Szegő, “Nyugat-imádat” [Adoration of the West], *Ludas Matyi*, November 26, 1959.

45. Tibor Tóncz, “Ajándék” [Present], *Ludas Matyi*, February 18, 1960.

46. Sándor Erdei, “Nyugat-imádók Londonban” [Admirers of the West in London], *Ludas Matyi*, May 9, 1963.

47. R. H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company 1920).

48. In addition to those I have already discussed, here is a selection of more cartoons pertinent to this topic: Tibor Tóncz, “Kovácsék autót vásároltak ...” [The Kovács family bought a car ...], *Ludas Matyi*, May 22, 1958; György Várnai,

“Használt kocsit vett” [He bought a preowned car], *Ludas Matyi*, May 22, 1958; idem, “Garázshiány” [Shortage of garages], *Ludas Matyi*, November 27, 1958; Pál Pusztai, “Bevásárlás után” [After shopping], *Ludas Matyi*, December 10, 1959; József Szűr-Szabó, “Dühöng a gyűjtőszervenvedély” [The passion of collectors unleashed], *Ludas Matyi*, March 5, 1959; idem, “Aránytalan fejlődés” [Uneven development], *Ludas Matyi*, May 21, 1959; Sándor Gerő, “Új kocsitulajdonosok” [New car owners], *Ludas Matyi*, November 10, 1960; Tibor Kaján, cover page, no title, *Ludas Matyi*, January 28, 1960; Balázs Balázs-Piri, “Fontossági sorrend” [Priorities], *Ludas Matyi*, September 20, 1962.

49. Márta Nagy, “Jelentés. Ki a gazdag? Ki a szegény? A lakosság véleményei a gazdagságról, a szegénységről és a társadalomban meglévő anyagi különbségekről” (Report. Who are the rich? Who are the poor? Opinions in the population about affluence, poverty and the material differentiation prevalent in society), March 1975, “Internal publication” (Belső kiadvány) of the Research Center of Mass Communication, 1975. *Open Society Archives* (hereafter OSA), Papers of the Hungarian Institute for Public Opinion Research, TK 420-2-2, Box 10, RJ 10103.

50. Tamás Szecskő, “Kitekintés a következő másfél évtizedre (1975-1990)” [An outlook upon the coming one and a half decade], OSA, Papers of the Hungarian Institute for Public Opinion Research, TK 420-2-1, Box 5, 5. Together with a second draft and with comments received on the first draft. The drafts are not dated, but one of two commentaries Szecskő received (from Imre Pozsgay) was dated February 19, 1974. Szecskő’s revise, with the new title, “Társadalmi-politikai körvonalak: 1975-1990” (A socio-political outline, 1975-1990) is in this same box.

51. On these developments, see Miklós Lehmann, “Az elidegenedés- és antropológiai-vita politikai összefüggései. A marxista filozófia reneszánszától a filozófusperig” [The political background to the alienation- and the anthropological debate. From the renaissance of Marxism to the philosophers’ process] (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Filozófiai Intézete, n. d.), <http://www.phil-inst.hu/~lehmann/elidegen.htm> (accessed December 21, 2007); Zsolt Papp, et al., *Filozófus-per 1973* (Budapest: Világosság special edition, 1989); and Ervin Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék (1968–1988)* [The Hungarian democratic opposition, 1968-1988], (Budapest: T-Twins, 1995).

52. Minutes of the “Ideological Debate” at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, March 28, 1973, *Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences* (hereafter MTA LT), Papers of the Chief Secretary, F-76/1973 – also in MOL 288 f 22/1973/45. őe, TK/416/12, 37–59 fols.

53. Cf. György Péteri, “Contested Socialisms: The Conflict Between Critical Sociology and Reform Economics in Communist Hungary, 1967–1971,” *Social History* 41, no. 3 (2016): 249–266.

54. Szecskő did make a revision, however, with a new title (“A socio-political outline, 1975–1990”), which became radically more optimistic, upon the encouragement of Berend and Imre Pozsgay. Following Berend’s suggestions (actually including Berend’s commentary in the text, verbatim), he emphasized that one could expect “a growth of trust in the fair and humanistic nature of socialist society, the emergence of a structure of consumption [...] promoting better the development of socialist personality, and a healthier relationship, subjectively, to consumption goods; on the other hand, we will probably encounter, in some

circles, an individualistic orientation toward consumption and, as a reaction against this, the budding of asceticist-anarchistic hostility toward consumption (probably, among the young).” Tamás Szecskő, “Társadalmi-politikai körvonalak: 1975–1990” [A socio-political outline, 1975–1990], OSA, Papers of the Hungarian Institute for Public Opinion Research, TK 420-2-1, Box 5.

55. András Hegedüs, “Realitás és szükségszerűség” [Reality and inevitability], *Kortárs*, XI (7), July 1967, and András Hegedüs, “Sociology in Hungary. The Dilemma of Development” (ms, 1968), OSA, András Hegedüs Papers, Box IV.

56. András Hegedüs, “Optimalizálás és humanizálás. Az irányítási rendszer korszerűsítéséről” [Optimalization and humanization. On the modernization of the system of economic management], *Valóság* VIII, no. 3 (March 1965): 17–32. For a thoughtful analysis of Hegedüs’s ‘alternative socialism’ consult Tor André Bergli, “Humanisering” som alternativ: András Hegedüs og spørsmålet om menneskeliggjøring av sosialismen i 1960-årenes Ungarn [‘Humanization’ as An Alternative: András Hegedüs and the Issue of Humanizing Socialism in Hungary, in the 1960s], Unpublished MA thesis in history, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, 2010.

57. András Hegedüs, *A gondolkodás útvesztői* (Thinking astray), undated collection of essays, an unpublished book MS, originally delivered for publication “in the beginning of the 1970s.” OSA, András Hegedüs Papers, II/6.

58. Interview with András Hegedüs, December 1971 (ms, unknown interviewer), OSA, András Hegedüs Papers, II/7.

59. Cf. Péteri, “Contested Socialisms.”

60. András Hegedüs and Mária Márkus, “Alternatíva- és értékválasztás az elosztás és fogyasztás távlati tervezésében (Vitaanyag)” [Choices between alternatives and values in the long-term planning of distribution and consumption (Discussion paper)], n. d. [1969] MOL Papers of Gyula Karádi, Vice President of the Central Office of Planning, XIX-A-16-c, Box 6, Chief Department of Long-Term Planning.

61. Hegedüs and Márkus, “Alternatíva- és értékválasztás,” 41.

62. András Hegedüs, “On the Situation of the Sociology of Industry and Work,” in *II. Üzemszociológiai Konferencia, Győr, 1969. Október 6-7.* [IInd Conference in Industrial Sociology, October 6–7, 1969, Győr], ed. András B. Hegedüs (Budapest: MTESZ Gazdasági és Műszaki Választmány, 1970), 11. OSA, András Hegedüs Papers, V/2 or VII/4.

63. Éva Ehrlich, “A gazdasági fejlettség és a személyes fogyasztás színvonala nemzetközi összehasonlításban” [The level of economic development and personal consumption in international comparison], *Közgazdasági Szemle* XVII, no. 10 (October 1970): 1176.

64. Ibid.

65. András Hegedüs and Mária Márkus, “Modernization and the Alternatives of Social Progress,” Paper prepared for the International Sociological Conference on Modernization at [the] Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, June 11–June 18, 1972, OSA, András Hegedüs Papers, unnumbered box; the paper was published under the same title in *Telos* 17 (Fall 1973).

66. Ibid., 16.

67. Ibid., 17.

68. Ibid., 18.

69. Judit H. Sas, “A gyerekekkel szembeni családi követelmények alakulása és a történelmi-társadalmi változások” [Changing demands toward children in the family and their social-historical background], *Szociológia* 2 (1972): 197ff.

70. Péteri, “Streetcars of Desire,” 9–11.

71. Hegedüs and Márkus, “Alternativa- és értékválasztás,” 23.

72. István Huszár, et al., “Hipotézisek a foglalkoztatás és az életszínvonal alakulására 1985-ig” [Hypotheses for the development in employment and living standards until 1985], *Gazdaság* 3, no. 3 (1969): 17–40. See also Péteri, “Contested Socialisms,” 255ff.

73. Dr. Zsuzsa Ferge, “A foglalkoztatás és életszínvonal alakulása Magyarországon 1985-ig. Vita (A hozzászólók leveleinek összefoglaló elemzése),” *Budapest*, June 1970, together with other documentation relating to this episode, in: MOL Papers of Gyula Karádi, Vice President of the Central Office of Planning, XIX-A-16-c, Box 11, Chief Department of Long-Term Planning, 1970. Emphasis added.

74. Cf. György Péteri, “On the Legacy of State Socialism in Academia,” in *Academia in Upheaval: Origins, Transfers, and Transformations of the Communist Academic Regime in Russia and East Central Europe*, ed. Michael David-Fox and György Péteri (Westport, CT and London: Bergin & Garvey, 2000), 203–224.

75. This was one of the most significant insights of Ragnar Nurske, in his *Problems of Capital Formation in Underdeveloped Countries* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953). Incidentally, Nurske was the first to use the term “international demonstration effect.”

76. Mika Pantzar, “‘What are We to Do with Our New Affluence?’ Anticipating, Framing and Managing the Putative Plenty of Post-War Finland,” in *Coping with Excess. How Organizations, Communities and Individuals Manage Overflows*, ed. Barbara Czarniawska and Orvar Löfgren (Cheltenham and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013), 11–33.

77. Ibid., 13.

78. Cf. Olga Gurova, “Consumer Culture in Socialist Russia,” in *SAGE Handbook on Consumer Culture*, ed. O. Kravets, P. Maclaran, S. Miles, and E. Venkatesh (2018), Chapter 7.

Chapter 2

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New Sobriety

Comrade Kucsera and His Legacy

I remember a joke that was circulating in Budapest in the 1960s and 1970s. A party functionary is visited by his old mother from the countryside. She visited for the first time since he had made substantial advances in the nomenklatura. He picks her up from the railway station in the car the party assigned to serve him with a chauffeur and takes her to his spacious five room apartment on the Hill of Roses, on the green Buda side of the capital. He shows her around in the garden and then in the apartment, pointing proudly out all the family's acquisitions: the coveted house appliances of a "mechanized household" such as vacuum cleaner, floor brushing machine, refrigerator, washing machine, centrifuge, and the color television set, as well as the "colonial style" furniture in the living room. With hubris on his face as he concludes the process of stock-taking, he looks at his mother only to find, to his surprise, that the old lady is about to fall into tears. "What is wrong, Mum?! Aren't you happy to see how well we are doing?" he asks. The mother answers: "Of course I am happy for you, my son! I just came to think of what might happen if the Communists come back!"

The joke resonates with several layers of the discussion to come as the reader makes her way further into this book. Although proud of her son's advances in society, the old peasant woman appears to have remembered the communist project that was to create a new socialist society characterized by justice, general welfare, and equality, and a new type of human: the Socialist Man, whose ethos and actual practices would never bring the self-interests of personal individual well-being and the interests of progress, equality, and improved living conditions for *everyone* on a

societal level into conflict with one another. Most importantly, the old woman understood all too well that the communists, their ideas, norms, and values as she got to know them (in the old days of 1919 or in the 1940s and 1950s), and her son, in terms of the values and norms manifest in his everyday and private life, were far enough from one another to be seriously worried.

This tension, sometimes even sharp contrast, between what was presented as the communist ethos, and the actual everyday practices of the party-state apparatus class has been quite well known for Hungary's communist rulers themselves. For anyone familiar with the history of communist era Hungary, the word "functionary" would first of all be a reminder of Gyula Háy's famous satirical essay "Why do I dislike him?"¹ The essay was one of the true pearls born amidst and out of the revolt of the anti-Stalinist (yet socialist and Marxist) intellectuals against Stalin's (and "Stalin's best disciple" Mátyás Rákosi's) sociopolitical order.² It was a bitter showdown directed toward the social stratum that could be held responsible for the profound crisis bringing misery to the country and the whole region of Eastern Europe. The target was the apparatus class—all the functionaries of the party-state from the first secretary of the communist party's central committee down to the last chairman of district councils and party organizations. This was the political class of state socialism, distinguishing itself from its Western counterpart primarily, in that it did not (and hardly ever needed to) earn its legitimacy and authority by way of democratic elections.

For his essay, Háy created, among other symbolic characters, a fictional *Comrade Kucsera*, the much hated functionary of the Rákosi era. Some of the edge of Háy's vitriolic critique may have been blunted by the rhetorical device so typical of the era when the accusation of not being "constructive enough" was often turned against critical voices: he did distinguish between the "good functionary" (like Comrades Takács and Mrs. Nemere) and the "bad functionary" (Kucsera), with the caveat, though, that it was ominous to find even Comrades Takács and Mrs. Nemere to be so vehemently defending a wrong-doer like Kucsera, as if it had been vital for them to keep the prestige and standing of their kindred in society intact (*védik a "mundér becsületét"*).

Háy described and critiqued Kucsera on account of his secretive, uninformed, and arbitrary power practices driven by self-interest. Kucsera was not merely a bureaucrat, Háy emphasized, that is, not simply someone who tended to envelop (and strangle) all social activities and creativity in an excessive amount of paperwork. He was a bureau-*crat*, a ruler subjecting society to the needs of maintaining and enhancing the power of the class of bureau-*crats*, or officialdom.

Many people, when they critique bureaucracy, they merely keep in mind easily corrigible errors, like irrational agendas, matters being juggled by and

between different agencies, etc. I believe the real issue is of much greater significance: it is about the question whom this society serves? After all, the second half of the word, “-cracy” [after the Greek κράτος (krátos)] means “power” or “rule,” and at one place and one time there can only be one kind of rule: either it is the “demos” or it is the “bureau” who rules. Either the people or this self-serving bureaucratic cancerous tissue [*Vagy a nép, vagy az öncélúvá vált funkcionáriusi szövetség*] has the power. The two are incompatible both in principle and in practice. If we want to have democracy, socialism, and communism, we have to get rid of Kucsera.

If the reader still has any doubt about whether or not Háy’s reasoning is inspired by or a kin to one or another version of new-class theories along the long line going from Jan W. Machajski, through L. Trotsky’s “Betrayed Revolution,” Milovan Djilas’ “New Class,” György Konrád and Iván Szelényi’s “Intellectuals’ Road,” and so on, consider this interesting paragraph using the language of Marxian political economy:

What does Kucsera live off? No doubt—out of the expropriation of surplus value. His livelihood springs from the fact that in our society a considerable part of the surplus value is spent not on the public good—not on schools, hospitals, investments serving production, public safety, on maintaining the necessary governing organizations, on science, arts, vacationing, entertainment, or ideological work—but on Kucsera.

But Háy was optimistic and believed that the Kucsera phenomenon could be weeded out from the garden of socialist social order, for he emphasized “Kucsera is the grand misunderstanding of our history, he is the representative of an alien, non-existent social order in the middle of our life of building socialism. Kucsera is something soft we have stepped into along this dead-end of our history.”

For students of the social and cultural history of communist Hungary’s political class in the post-1956 era, Háy’s essay is momentous. His Comrade Kucsera from the revolutionary October of 1956 constituted an image powerful enough to become and remain to be engraved onto the public mind long after the appearance of the article itself. Significantly, quite a few members within the apparatus class itself found “Kucseraism” a burden serious enough even a long decade after the essay saw the light of day as is witnessed by several items of the documentation originating from a major survey about the social status and prestige of the functionary in the late 1960s.³ But it is also of great interest because of what Háy starts his critique with:

Let us start with some *petitesses*, things that strike one, to begin with, as minor issues of taste: Kucsera is a parvenu and the parvenus, indulging in their newly acquired riches and power, are disgusting. I don’t know if there has been in world history such an intense and massive occurrence of parvenus

as that of the Kucseras. Do not misunderstand me. I am not for egalitarianism. Even though I would love to see the worker driving in his own little car to the factory (if I remember correctly, we promised him something like that), I still find it natural and necessary that Kucsera, while on an important function, should not waste his time and energy hanging onto a streetcar or squeezed breathless in an overcrowded bus. What is more, I more than welcome that an elegant, representative car is placed at his disposal. I also find it correct that his salary should be way higher than that of the old lady, Mrs. Szamek, who cleans the men's room after Kucsera. . . . As I say, I accept Kucsera's car, his higher-than-average income, his nice apartment—without these he could not perform his role.

But I definitely hate that all these things required with a view to practical objectives tend to be turned into the means of a diametrically opposite kind of practice. With the help of his car, his salary, his exclusive shops, his exclusive holiday resorts, and so on, Kucsera isolates himself from life, from the people, from the party; and turns into a usurper exploiting and ruling over the people and the party, gets used to an outrageous pomposity, forgets the simple art of walking and, therewith, also the knowledge of people and the real world as is experienced by the walkers. Kucsera clings to his tasteless pretentious lifestyle to the extent that by now, believe me, the toughest force standing in the way of democratic progress is probably no longer the political errors, incompetence, and personal ties of the Kucseras. Rather, it is their determination at all costs to insist on their parvenu lifestyle.

Háy maintains here that Kucsera's everyday—his exclusive lifestyle, his living standards, his materialistic acquisitiveness—defined his world as entirely apart from that of the rest of society. He found the everyday practices of the Kucseras not only morally reprehensible but also a major threat that would derail the socialist project.

The revolution of October 1956 and its significant component, the revolt of revisionist communist intellectuals, were crushed by Soviet tanks and followed by the counterrevolutionary terror of the "Workers'-Peasants' Revolutionary Government" of János Kádár. It would be foolish not to see that the primary aim of Kádár's counterrevolution was restoration—more particularly, the restoration of the communist party's monopoly over governance and political activity that was lethally challenged by several developments from February through to the beginning of November 1956. But it would also be foolish to turn a blind eye to the fact that Kádár and his leadership were just as determined to redefine the complexion of the state-socialist social order, prompted and urged by the need and will to leave Stalinism behind. The need, because the comeback from their exile in the Soviet Union of Hungary's former Stalinist leaders (especially Mátyás Rákosi), was an entirely possible scenario for quite a while and was not taken lightheartedly by Kádár and his colleagues. The will, because Kádár had no doubt that if his rule were to acquire any legitimacy

at home and abroad, he would have to prove that the alternative he offered toward freeing the country from Stalinism, from Rákosi's terror regime, was superior to whatever had been genuinely socialist in the program of Imre Nagy and the revisionist reformers around him. Indeed, this is exactly what defined the Janus face of Kádár's counterrevolution and its consolidation: as if driven by a Shakespearean demon (the "logic of power") it saw no other way to assert the interests of restoration than by way of bloody terror⁴ at the same time as it resumed and pursued with little delay the reformist program of the New Course aiming in the longer run to establish new, softer methods to rule, to generate legitimacy, and to find a new *modus vivendi* with the society it subjected. All this was to have significant consequences for the functionary too: for his lifestyle, for his image prevailing among, and his relation to the rest of society.

That János Kádár's new regime had policies with regard to the material-economic situation and social standing of the ruling apparatus class has not been noticed, even less discussed in the scholarly literature. Peep-show-like presentations and moralizing condemnations of the "luxuries" indulged by Rákosi's as well as Kádár's "nomenklatura" (especially by the top elites) have been going hand in hand with a self-inflicted ignorance and lack of interest. Still, the fact of the matter is that the leadership of the reborn communist party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, early on took some radical measures cutting deeply into the more or less formal privileges, relative advantages, and "perks" enjoyed by the functionaries during the Rákosi era. Revealingly as to the acquisitive mindset of a number of party functionaries, on August 29, 1957, the Central Committee Secretariat had to instruct the party's lower level committees to reclaim the buildings, furniture, and other properties of the party that in various ways and manners went lost in the upheavals of October–November 1956, emphasizing "Those comrades in whose possession there are properties of the Party should be obliged to restore them."⁵ The Organizing Committee (*Szervező Bizottság*) of the reconstructed communist party (*Magyar Szocialist Munkáspárt – MSZMP*) resolved as early as on December 10, 1956 that apparatus privileges with regard to fully paid sick leaves between one and three months should be discontinued. Similarly, they decided that from December 17, 1956 and on the subvention contributed by the party budget to each lunch consumed by members of the apparatus should be reduced from Forint 3.80 to Forint 2.00 per meal.⁶ The party leadership decided also to transfer all the holiday and weekend facilities that up to 1956 were in the possession of the communist party's central committee apparatus to the National Council of Trade Unions (hereafter referred to as *SZOT*, the Hungarian acronym), a highly important episode that we are going to discuss in greater detail in chapter 5. This fact soon forced the same leadership to instruct the Department of Party-Economic

and Administrative Management (*Pártgazdasági és Ügykezelési Osztály*—hereafter referred to as PGO) of the Central Committee to try and “arrange that the employees of the party apparatus are secured vacation and weekend opportunities as much as possible by way of the SZOT providing the party with a larger contingent of [vacation] vouchers [*előnyösebb beutalási keret*] than the [industrial and other state] enterprises and other offices.”⁷ Even the top leaders of the party (members of the Executive Committee [*Intéző Bizottság*—later called Political Bureau] and the Central Committee Secretaries) had to depend on the services of the newly created Hungária-Balaton Tourism and Holidays Company, to where the summer houses and hotels formerly in the possession of the communist party apparatus had been transferred, if they and their families wanted to have a vacation or get away from the capital for a weekend. We are going to see later on also that restrictive measures were taken to curb the apparatus’ appetite for the private use of the party’s fleet of personal cars. The Kádárist leadership also took resolute steps to discipline hunting, one of the favorite pastimes of (central as well as provincial) functionaries, and keep it within newly created legal frameworks.

János Kádár emphasized in a conversation in 1957 with members of the party’s central disciplinary collegium, the Central Revision Commission [*Központi Ellenőrző Bizottság*—KEB], that communist morals needed to be strengthened not only among the simple party members but “primarily from above,” for “those who make exception for themselves, are not entitled to talk about [morals]” [*Nincs joga erről beszélni annak, aki ezt nem tartja be*].⁸ At the end of 1956, the party leadership decided that the country’s laws should be meticulously observed with regard to working conditions and social benefits even when it came to the employees of the party. As PGO chief Mrs. P. Laczkó explained to a national conference of the party-economic and administration section chiefs of all the provincial (county) party organizations,

we were often attacked in the past on account of resolutions and decisions made in the party in breach of the Law on Working Life [*a Munka Törvénykönyve*]. . . . We wanted already before October [1956] to eliminate this dualism based on which the party could be criticized for offering better social-economic conditions and opportunities for the employees in the party apparatus than could be offered to workers in general by the socialist state. It was with this [dualism] in mind that the privilege extended to political functionaries to receive full salaries for three months and administrators for one when they fell ill had been discontinued. We discontinued the former regime of party vacationing too, whereby the employees of the party had been entitled to use the party’s holiday hotels and houses free of charge every year. At the same time, only 8–10 percent of the unionized workers per year could get to such facilities. We are now securing holiday vouchers for

the party apparatus through the SZOT. . . . The paid vacation leave of those working in the party apparatus is granted now in accordance with the Law on Working Life. We have discontinued the availability of cars for personal [private] use, and the party no longer pays for the telephone calls made from the apartments of leading functionaries.⁹

The party leadership also made it clear why the norms of new sobriety needed to be keenly observed and implemented:

When we are assessing the social situation of the party apparatus, we should never lose sight of how things developed in October [1956]. This must be kept in mind. When the general [economic and political] situation improves, the simple workers [*egyszerű dolgozók*] will no longer find it important to attentively follow how the social “achievements” of the apparatus develop. This does not mean, of course, that in a couple of years’ time we’ll return in this respect to what had been prevalent before October [1956]. . . . The Law on Working Life will still be valid, but we will apply not its letters but its spirit, and if the situation requires it we’ll deviate from both [*nem betűjét hanem szellemét fogjuk alkalmazni és ha a helyzet úgy kívánja, indokolt esetben attól el is fogunk térni*]. . . . The essence of this matter is that the party functionaries, the successors of professional revolutionaries, if they are to deserve this dignity, have to live modestly.

We cannot risk it that it should again become possible, in a twisted manner, to turn the living conditions of the party apparatus into [a target of] counterrevolutionary demagoguery. . . . Members of the party apparatus should understand that what is happening is not that they got deprived of all their previous social benefits—it is rather that we have reduced the excesses prevailing hitherto to a level that is proportionate with what the socialist state can at present deliver.¹⁰

PGO chief Mrs. P. Laczkó made it clear repeatedly that in the opinion of the party leadership “employees of the party apparatus should in no way be better provided for by the country than workers can be.”¹¹ In an early assessment of the work of the PGO, Central Committee Secretary Jenő Fock also confirmed that if there had been one correct principle guiding the work of the department, it was “that we have to exhibit greater modesty than in the past and this should not be treated as a [political] mistake.”¹²

The new sobriety imposed on the apparatus class by the political leadership of János Kádár had, of course, an ambivalent reception on behalf of the functionaries. Protests were sounded against giving away the party’s holiday infrastructure, and indeed, within less than a year the party leadership made a U-turn in this matter. A grievance regularly taken up at various meetings arranged by the PGO of the Central Committee was that party functionaries and their families no longer qualified for the 50%

discount cards on National Railways after 1956, a benefit available for all other categories of public employees. The party functionaries complained that in their case the imposition of the Law on Working Life brought with it only negative consequences, and they also found it hard to accept the consistently implemented policy that their salaries should as a principle lag approximately 4 percent behind the salaries of their brethren in the state apparatus (government departments, national authorities, county and district councils, etc.).¹³

While some of these tensions between different categories of functionaries as well as between functionaries and the rest of society were there to stay throughout the Kádár era, the scenario outlined by Mrs. Laczkó in 1957 as a precondition for substantial improvements came faster than expected. By the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, improving economic conditions (and a number of reforms introduced silently by the Kádár regime) had enabled Hungarian families to be concerned with making advances in their own individual well-being rather than becoming scandalized by the material and other perks and privileges going to the apparatus class, the so-called *kucseraism*.

Indeed, high-seated party leaders and the PGO also seem to have grown less troubled by the possibility of the emergence of a provocative advantage in the material-economic situation of the apparatus class than the possibility that its members might prove all too weak to resist the temptations of budding consumerism and their acquisitive lust that is reflected in their becoming heavily indebted. As early as in April 1959, the new leader of PGO, Dezső Lakatos, warned of the increasing tendency in Budapest as well as in the provincial party organizations that functionaries amass ever larger debts:

We mustn't allow this to happen. We need to assist the comrades with credits from the savings bank to enable them to buy furniture of greater value, but we should prevent the accumulation of debts. We should press [*szorítani*] the party functionaries to save and to plan [their investments] with an eye to the amount of forints they have today and not what they [believe they] will have tomorrow.¹⁴

NOTES

1. Gyula Háty, "Miért nem szeretem?," *Irodalmi Ujság*, October 6, 1956, 3–4. http://server2001.rev.hu/msite/msite_display_otherdoc_tanulmany_doc.asp?id=1067&docid=18&order=1 (accessed January 17, 2016). I use this internet version of the text, made available by the 1956 Institute, Budapest. All quotes of

Gyula Háy's essay originate from this source. All translations from the Hungarian in this book are made by the author.

2. The best study discussing this revolt continues to be the excellent book of János M. Rainer, *Az író helye. Viták a magyar irodalmi sajtóban 1953–1956* [The place of the writer. Debates in Hungary's literary press, 1953–1956]. ("Gyorsuló idő" series.) (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1990).

3. See, for example, "A politikai funkcionáriusok helyzete, anyagi és erkölcsi megbecsülése. Vita-vázlat" (The status of the political functionaries, their economic acknowledgement and social prestige), no author and no date are specified. The document is certainly from 1967, being one of numerous versions of a paper underlying a discussion to be arranged at the time in preparation for survey research to be conducted by the MSZMP's Institute of Social Research in 1968. Papers of the Társadalomtudományi Intézet (Institute of Social Research of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party), MOL, 288. f. 2. cs. 97. öe., fol. 29.

4. Kádár's Macbethian moment was the murder of Imre Nagy (and more than 300 others) which came to haunt him throughout his lifetime. At the end, he, like Macbeth, understood that the "Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill" was moving against him. His sense of guilt never dissipated entirely and came back to him with a vengeance and with particular strength in his last weeks of awareness—which is clearly reflected in his last speech on April 12, 1989. At this point, he tried to defend his decisions but also admitted that he "regretted [the loss of] everybody." On the morning of June 16, the day of Imre Nagy's symbolic reburial, when Kádár had been already hospitalized and seldom with a conscious mind, he got up and started taking his clothes on. His doctor asked "Comrade Kádár, where are you going?" He responded, "I am going to the funeral of Imre, everybody will be there." The doctor managed to persuade him not to go. On July 6, 1989, he passed away. The full text of the speech has been published by Mandiner.hu at https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20120526_kadar_janos_kadar_janos_utolso_beszede last accessed on May 11, 2023. His wish to participate in Imre Nagy's reburial was reported in Vági Barbara, "Kádár: 'Megyek Imre temetésére. Mindenki ott van'," *Origo*, October 26, 2016. <https://www.origo.hu/kultura/20161025-kadar-janos-imre-temetesere-megyek-mindenki-ott-van.html> (accessed May 11, 2023).

5. MSZMP Central Committee Secretariat's resolution regarding certain issues pertinent to the party economic and administrative work [A Titkárság határozata a pártgazdasági és ügykezelési munka egyes kérdéseiről], August 19, 1957, MOL 288. f. 37/1957 2. öe.

6. Papers of the MSZMP Budapest Committee, *BFL*, XXXV (1) f. 7. öe., 1956. XII. – 1957. XII.

7. A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Intéző Bizottsága 1957. év május hó 14-i ülésén az 1957. évi költségvetésével kapcsolatban hozott határozata [The May 14, 1957 resolution of the Executive Committee [early name of the Political Bureau, the party's top decision-making body] of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party [MSZMP] with regard to the annual budget for 1957] – "Strictly Confidential" note addressed to PGO chief, Mrs. Pálné Laczkó, dated June 11, 1957, MOL 288. F. 37/1957/1. öe., fol. 214.

8. Gyula Fodor, the leader of the party's central disciplinary collegium (*Revíziós Bizottság* – Control Committee) informed of this conversation the members of the PGO, at his meeting with the latter on October 14, 1957. Minutes of the meeting are in MOL 288. f. 37/1957 1. őe.

9. Mrs. P. Laczkó sending her speech to be delivered at the national meeting of leaders the party-economic and administration sections of the county party organizations, May 24, 1957, to Central Committee Secretary György Marosán, MOL 288. f. 37/1957/5. őe., fol. 27.

10. Ibid., fols. 27–28.

11. Speech delivered at the meeting of leaders the party-economic and administration departments of the county party organizations, September 8–9, 1958, MOL 288. f. 37/1958/1. őe., fol. 36.

12. Jenő Fock's speech to the October 14, 1957 meeting of the Central Committee's Department of Party-Economy and Administration, MOL 288. f. 37/1957/1. őe., fol. 3.

13. For the first occurrence of the policy of a 4% gap to the advantage of functionaries employed in the state apparatuses: Mrs P. Laczkó, leader of PGO, "Suggestion to provide for the safety and material needs of the members of the Executive Committee and the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party," dated May 10, 1957, "Strictly Confidential!" PGO/305, MOL 288. f. 37/1957/1. őe., fols. 184–186, under point 7.

14. Dezső Lakatos, Central Committee PGO leader, in the course of the meeting of the section of the Budapest Party Committee, April 7, 1959, Minutes of the meeting, BFL Papers of the Budapest Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, XXXV (1) f. 21. őe., 2.

Chapter 3

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The Acquisitive Functionary

What was on the mind of Dezső Lakatos and other concerned party leaders was not so much how to encourage and assist members of the apparatus to maintain a better balance between their income and spending. Rather, it was the tendency of increasing materialism of the party-state apparatus class tangible already in the early years of the first decade of the Kádár era, and it was neither about historical nor dialectical materialism. It was about the emergence and growth of the *acquisitive functionary* in tandem with consumerism rapidly taking root in and establishing its grip over everyday and private life in Hungarian society.

IN THE MIRROR OF PARTY DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

Admittedly, the historical study of practices in the domain of everyday and private life is anything but an effortless enterprise. Archival evidence is scarce and hard to find, especially if it is to satisfy the need to cover longer periods and to secure a minimum of representativity.

In order to corroborate my claim regarding “the acquisitive functionary,” I will begin with relating a selection of cases that were brought to the Central Commission of Control [*Központi Ellenőrző Bizottság*—hereafter KEB]. KEB was the communist party’s highest disciplinary body with the unenviable task of making members of the party and, not least, of the party-state apparatus class to observe the law and the norms and values of communist ethics. I am presenting these cases not to judge, even less to shame any of the persons who were at the receiving end of disciplinary

measures by KEB. I will refrain from revealing their names and will use only their initials. The meaning of presenting the cases is to show the contours of the practices informed by a confluence of acquisitive lust and opportunities generated by bureaucratic (distributive) power enabling members of the party-state apparatus class to access various coveted goods and services.

The affair of BR and KB started some time in 1965, the KEB investigation of the affair was launched in early 1967.¹ KB was the general director of the Hungarian Post Office. BR, as the head of a Main Department for Planning at the Ministry of Transportation and Postal Services, ranked right under the level of a deputy minister. The two of them and four other high-ranking officials of the same ministry, agreed upon that, at KB's initiative, the Budapest Directorate of Postal Services would initiate and fund a project of building a residential house of twelve apartments in one of the finest neighborhoods of the green and hilly Buda side of the capital, *Pasarét*, in the 2nd District.

The whole communist era in Hungary (and in the rest of the Soviet Bloc) was characterized by a debilitating quantitative as well as qualitative shortage of housing. Major companies as well as government authorities were forced to deal with the most acute problems of their workers and employees by way of building residential houses out of their own resources. To be permitted to do so, they had to present a complete documentation of the projects including not merely the technical detail but also presenting the planned beneficiaries chosen as the targeted tenants of the new apartments. These documents needed to be approved by the ministry overseeing (or being themselves) the entity that wished to build the house as well as by the Ministry of Building Industries, the National Investment Bank, and possibly even by the Ministry of Finance. The review process was meant to ensure that strict national standards were observed both regarding general costs, the avoidance of extravagance, and excesses when it comes to the size of apartments and also the quality of fittings, equipment, and materials used. The objective at the level of national economy was to secure the best use of scarce resources while satisfying maximally the needs for housing that were to be ranked in the light of social-political priorities. The Budapest Directorate of Postal Services filed an application with the National Investment Bank arguing the necessity of the investment with reference to their more than 1,000 (mostly blue collar) workers whose housing situation needed to be addressed. Indeed, according to the original plan, for the tenants of two apartments the secretariat of the ministry was granted the right to nominate candidates, while the rest would serve ten families of postal workers struggling under the conditions of inadequate housing. But when it was concretely decided who was going to get the apartments, it turned out

that five high-level ministerial functionaries and KR, the general director of National Postal Services, were among the future tenants of the house. Thus, the investment project was modified as the six larger (two room) apartments in the house apparently had to meet "special needs" because they were assigned to "leading comrades." The actual two room apartments resulting from these modifications "grew" from fifty-three (defined according to the national norm) to 83 square meters in size and the costs to build them more than doubled from Forint 160,400 to 332,000. The increase in costs, however, was not merely a function of the substantial addition to the size—the "leading comrades" had individual wishes as to the equipment and the quality of materials used. BR, as the head of the Main Department of Planning of the Ministry of Transportation and Postal Services, did not only manage to persuade his boss, Deputy Minister Dezső Horn, to give his consent to the suggestion that six high-ranking functionaries, one of them BR himself, should get access to the six largest apartments in the house (instead of the workers of the Budapest Post Office), but also transferred Forint 800,000 out of the ministry's investment funds to meet the increased costs. A part of the resources required for the six enlarged and upgraded apartments was secured at the expense of the small, one-and-half room apartments, their size getting reduced from the planned 44 to 40 square meters. The tenancy of these apartments was then granted indeed to low-level clerical and manual workers of the Budapest Post Office.

The KEB investigation concluded that KB and BR were "responsible for initiating and enabling a building project to satisfy luxury requirements [to their own personal benefit and] at the expense of the people's economy." BR and KB were sentenced, according to the party disciplinary code, to "severe reprimand," whereafter their cases were also considered by the Minister of Transportation and Postal Services. The minister thought no damage was caused to the "people's economy" and the punishments meted out were exclusion from bonuses for a year and both functionaries were ordered to pay reparations to the extent of Forint 8,400 and 10,000, respectively. They remained in their positions and in the possession of their new apartments. In 1971, the severe reprimands were expunged, having considered BR's and KB's genuine repentance of their wrong-doing, the fact that "they eliminated [their] bad attitude [with regard to] personal opportunities [arising out of their official] position," their good work and unselfish service of the party even before and ever since. This was not quite as János Kádár imagined on December 24, 1966 how the affair would be handled. In his strictly confidential note to Central Committee Secretary Rezső Nyers, initiating the investigation after a journalist of the party's daily, *Népszabadság* informed him about the affair, he wrote this:

I consider this case to be grave enough to be examined centrally and, if the indicated circumstances prove factually correct serious measures must be taken both on behalf of the Party and the State. . . . I am not suggesting that “an example has to be made”, but this case is really beyond the limits [*de hát mindennek van határa*]. This is the kind of case against which the leaders of the Central Committee and the Government have been preaching for years . . . we cannot allow this! Resolute measures have to be taken and no merits of the past can shield anyone from serious consequences.

Kádár’s reaction was echoed in an anonymous letter to the party’s Central Committee (registered on March 14, 1967 with the code KEB/9007/3), with the signature “Several Old Communists.” It reported the project of BR and KB with the following commentary:

It seems, an aristocracy has taken shape, kept by the state and the people in the greatest well-being, and it can do whatever it likes. . . . If we continue to allow this, we’ll belie the basic ideas of communism and confirm the doctrines of bourgeois ideologues who “prognosticate” the formation of a new class.

For our discussion, however, the most significant commentary comes in the first draft report of the KEB investigation from February 13, 1967. The draft emphasized the following:

The information and data acquired in the course of .. [this] .. investigation indicate that even other ministries [government departments] carry out similarly expensive construction projects, going well beyond the national norms. In most of the cases it is also characteristic that *the beneficiaries [of the apartments built] are not the workers and employees of the ministry in question but leading functionaries of other ministries.* [emphasis added – G.P.] The single most expensive two apartments were built in Miskolc for two deputy presidents of the university with a cost of Forint 840.000 each. The city of Szeged built 8 apartments for Forint 350.000 each. In Budapest, the Ministry of Heavy Industries built 28 and the Ministry of Transportation and Postal Services 38 apartments at the average cost of Forint 240–260.000.

Few of the party-state’s functionaries had serious problems with housing: they were seldom forced to live in unhealthy, small apartments and houses of low or no comfort at all, unlike very many of the unprivileged commoners. But, as the KEB’s comment shows, there was a widespread, tangible push from among these same functionaries who understood themselves to be entitled to improve and upgrade their own housing situation by way of carving out a disproportionately large slice of the resources the party-state disposed of, and claimed to want to devote toward, its welfare policy objectives.

Secretary of the Budapest XV District's Party Committee, KH, made himself a bad reputation in the eyes of KEB as early as in 1959–1960, due to an extramarital relationship he cultivated. The party did not appreciate “disorderly family relations,” particularly among high-ranking functionaries who were married and had children, like KH. While KEB conducted their investigation of KH's affair, some other mischiefs of the party secretary came to light. KH's chauffeur, TF reported to KEB that KH, with the assistance of the Commander of the XV District's Workers' Militia,² ÖK, built a weekend house for himself in the charming village of Alsógöd, along the Danube north of Budapest. It happened to be so that the Council (the municipal authority) of the XV District was also building in Alsógöd. They were building a pioneer camp for the district's primary school students. KH saw to it that some of the building materials (bricks, slates for the roof, etc.) delivered to the pioneer camp were redirected to his weekend house. As his chauffeur revealed, KH and ÖK always bought a smaller portion of the same building materials to have invoices and receipts showing as if what came into his possession was properly paid for. KH did not hesitate either to appropriate some armchairs and timber to the benefit of his weekend house from the headquarters of the XV District Party Committee itself. Similarly, he exploited the services of the district's Property Management Company (*Ingatlankezelő Vállalat, IKV*).³ The XV District IKV was the source of much of the cement used at KH's dacha. They also acquired two doors for KH's dacha, and their workers mounted the windows. KH even tried and offered one of the doors to his chauffeur (after all, he knew all too much about his boss' everyday and private life) but the offer was turned down. The chauffeur told KEB that he not only transported KH and ÖK, together with their respective mistresses to Alsógöd, but he often was instructed by his boss to transport building materials and furniture to the dacha with the party's car (which KH had an exclusive use of). Right after his disciplinary procedure, he was removed from the XV District's Party Committee and appointed into a leading economic position at one of the country's largest industrial firm (*Egyesült Izzó*) where he got also elected member of the 5th party organization. From the KEB, he received a severe reprimand which, on account of “diligent work in the workers' movement” and other merits, was expunged in early 1964.⁴

BL was an engineer, studied economics, became a doctor of Technological Sciences, got a degree at the Political Academy of the MSZMP and at the Máté Zalka Military Academy (this latter earned him the rank of major) and had a long career in the communist party apparatus. Until 1978, he served as the First Secretary of the Budapest XIth District Party Committee. Between 1978 and 1981, he advanced to secretary of the Budapest Party Committee, and from 1981, having received the disciplinary penalty of severe reprimand from the KEB, he was forced to leave the position of

Budapest MSZMP secretary and was appointed deputy general director of the Budapest Public Transportation Company (BKV). The KEB investigation against BL was concluded in April 1981.⁵ His severe reprimand was expunged by the KEB in 1984 with reference to the prevalent opinion at his new workplace that he was a good leader, a very active member of the BKV party organization, and that he had learnt from his mistakes and proved with his work and behavior that he deserved trust. What led to the “severe reprimand” in 1981? While still a secretary of the Budapest Party Committee, thanks to the generosity of the XI District Council (the municipal authority in the district where BL used to be the first secretary of the MSZMP district committee), BL acquired the possession of a property of about 1,000 square meter in one of Budapest’s most coveted green areas on the Buda side of the capital, on Oltvány Street. Although he only rented the property, BL built a concrete basement that included among others a garage whereupon he put a wooden dacha of 40 square meters and a large terrace. BL built this at the time rather impressive summer house with the assistance of a number of bosses of different companies in the capital city. Among these, HJ, the general manager (CEO) of the Transportation Construction Company METRÓ (*KÉV-Metró*, a company of large resources, tasked with the building of the Budapest underground system), was BL’s single most important ally. *KÉV-Metró* and its machines performed the earthworks required to prepare the plot for building the fundament and basement for the house. They provided the concrete, much of the wooden materials, and they built also the roof for BL. In building the shed for the garden storage, HJ participated personally. BL was invoiced for all the work and materials by *KÉV-Metró*, but at a ridiculously low price. This applied also to BL’s “business relationship” to other firms from which he bought services and materials. These were all companies whose activities were controlled by BL on behalf of the MSZMP Budapest Committee, and they were readily offering substantial price cuts to the mighty secretary of the capital city’s party organization. Indeed, during the investigation, KEB reprimanded BL for covering up time after time for HJ when the latter had been repeatedly reported for his corrupt dealings. BL was found guilty also of arbitrarily stopping disciplinary and criminal procedures against another high-ranking industrial manager who later on was excluded from the party on account of his corrupt and criminal economic activities. Crowning his efforts to create a representative enough dacha for himself, BL laid his hands on two lion statuettes that allegedly were no longer needed at the entrance of the Academy of Municipal Employees (*Tanácsakadémia*). He kept them in the yard of the Budapest Party Committee until his dacha got finished, and then he placed them on the two sides of the broad stairs leading up to the dacha’s port—apt symbols heralding that the dacha’s owner was a high-ranking member of society, a man of significant accomplishments.

The Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP affair had a complex plot since it was not one acquisitive functionary but a whole network of functionaries who leveraged their official role and position to their private benefit. This network had a central nod, the Kecskemét division of MEZŐGÉP Tröszt (a cartel-like national organization uniting the whole branch of Hungary's agricultural machine construction), and its director or CEO who obliged other functionaries by offering and delivering to them the services/products of his company at highly favorable conditions.⁶ The director of the Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP was CsL.

CS, the general director of the large state company, Glass Industrial Works (*Üvegipari Művek*), filled his house with "colonial" furniture (much coveted in the state-socialist middle- and high-middle classes)⁷ produced individually for his needs by the Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP. Not only did he get the furniture gratis but he was also welcome to use the summer house of Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP, and he got his private house completely renovated by the same company (ordering some skilled workers from the Orosháza Glass Factory to the renovation when those skills were missing from Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP's work force). CS got a severe reprimand in 1983 which, with reference to his distinguished social and political activities, excellent leadership, meticulous observance of the party resolutions, and so on, was expunged by KEB in 1986.

The reader might wonder, how come furniture could be produced by a company turning out agricultural machinery? Well, CsL had a number of skillful carpenters on the payrolls of his company. Originally, they were employed to build wooden boxes for machines and spare parts that needed to be transported. This is what seems to have given him the idea to establish a side business relying to quite an extent upon the resources (workers, tools, machines, materials) available within Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP. He made an agreement with the workers he meant to include and, to keep the activity out of sight as much as possible, he set up a workshop on his own private property, near his house. It was here his workers produced the "colonial" furniture, mostly after their official work hours. What was in it for him? While his workers did certainly earn some extra, otherwise they wouldn't have worked for him, he himself did hardly get richer because of these activities. He did manage, however, to oblige quite a few high-ranking managers and ministerial functionaries in socialist industries and other bosses within the party-state.

BF was a department chief of the MSZMP committee of Bács-Kiskun County. His kitchen's furniture and the paneling in his house were produced by Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP. BF received the party disciplinary penalty of "reprimand" while he was a deputy department chief in the county committee. In fact, he had been promoted to the position of department chief *before* the reprimand was expunged by the KEB in 1986. The whole apparatus of the county committee, including its leading

secretaries, supported in unison the annulment of the reprimand, due to the excellent qualities of BF's contributions to the administrative and political work at the committee.

CsGy, a lawyer by education, but also a graduate of the Higher School of the Soviet Communist Party, made a career as a party functionary and between 1974 and 1979 served as the secretary leading the party organization in the Ministry of Metallurgical and Machine Construction Industries, the national supervisory authority of the field that constituted the actual profile of Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP. CsGy made Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP produce the building structure for his summer house at the Balaton Lake without a prior price offer and without a written order. When he was invoiced for the costs of the building structure already delivered, he found it all too expensive and refused to pay. He paid only after the penalty of severe reprimand was meted out and was instructed to pay by the KEB, in January 1984. In 1986, CsGy's severe reprimand was expunged as well.

FJ was an engineer by education and served from 1975 and on as the deputy General Director of MALÉV, the Hungarian air carrier. Skipping all the legally prescribed paper work, FJ ordered from Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP a bar counter for the VIP lounge at Ferihegy Airport as well as a set of "colonial" furniture for his own house. On the delivery bill from Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP, it was stated: "Not to be invoiced!" As CsL, the director of Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP explained, in exchange for the costs incurred at his company, they (employees of Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP) intended to "travel off" the costs on MALÉV flights. FJ got the penalty of severe reprimand in 1983 and, during the disciplinary procedure against him, he also paid what he personally owed to Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP. Recognizing his outstanding work at MALÉV and in the company's party organization and its executive committee, KEB expunged the severe reprimand in 1986.

GA was also an engineer by education, and he was head of a main department in the Ministry of Metallurgical and Machine Construction Industries from 1975. He continued in this position when the industrial branch ministries were merged into one Ministry of Industry, where he then served as a deputy minister between 1978 and 1985. At the end of 1985, he was appointed general director of TUNGSRAM, one of the large socialist industrial firms in the country. In December 1983, KEB issued the party disciplinary penalty of severe reprimand to GA. The reason for this was that GA had Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP to build for him a summer house, "ignoring moral norms and legal rules." No required documentation of the project (price offer, formal order, etc.) was prepared, while there were delivery documents with the note "Not to be invoiced" accepted by GA. He settled his debt to Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP only when the matter got into the hands of the police and ended up in the court. As he sincerely

regretted what he did and as his work ever since as a high-level functionary, professional, and party member had been recognized as excellent by all the relevant party organizations, and so on, GA's severe reprimand sentence was also expunged in December 1986.

KJ, university graduate in engineering and a graduate also of the MSZMP Higher School of Politics, made a career within the machine construction industry. He began, in the late 1950s, as an engineer at the Red Star Tractor Factory. From there, he advanced to the Ministry of Metallurgical and Machine Construction where, until 1979, he made through all the hierarchical grades to become the deputy head of a main department. In 1979, he got appointed the general director of the Screw Industrial Company (*Csavaripari Vállalat*). Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP produced "colonial" furniture for him too, free of charge as the costs were accounted for by the Kecskemét firm as "costs of advertising." He gave away to Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP two expensive machines, one of which was sold by the Kecskemét firm to a third company at Forint 600.000. Even the other machine was sold to a cooperative firm. KJ's "symbiotic relationship" with CsL and the Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP yielded him, and his wife summer vacations at the holiday facilities of MEZŐGÉP Tröszt free of charge. As part of the series of disciplinary procedures connected with the Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP affair, KJ received the penalty of severe reprimand in 1983, which again, similarly to all the other related cases, was expunged in December 1986, with reference to his diligent work both as the responsible executive of a large socialist company and as an exemplary, active member of the party.

KL, an agrarian engineer by education and chairman of the Zalavölgye-Pogányvár Agricultural Cooperative got caught in the Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP affair as well. He did not pay for the "colonial" furniture Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP delivered to his home, but he regularly supplied firewood, at the cost of his cooperative, to CsL, the director of the Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP company. There were also some other shady transactions that were going on between the two functionaries. KL received in 1983 a particularly severe disciplinary penalty: "severe reprimand with final warning" from the KEB. But in 1986, having considered his highly efficient work as a cooperative leader, his keen sense of legal and moral norms exhibited in maintaining and enforcing good order at the cooperative, his active work in and cooperation with the party organization, and so on, the KEB expunged his party penalty.

SzGy was an engineer with university education who made a career all the way to become a head of department in the Ministry of Metallurgical and Machine Construction Industries from 1976. He continued in this position when the industrial branch ministries were merged into one Ministry of Industry and then left in 1985 to take over the directorship over

the company called MEZŐGÉP INOCOORD. In 1983, he got the party disciplinary penalty "reprimand" for his less than regular dealings with the Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP. He got the latter firm to build onto his weekend property a wooden house. The project was carried out completely undocumented, and SzGy did not pay for either the work or the materials used. Only when the party disciplinary procedure was initiated against him, did he pay for the building. At its December 1986 meeting, the KEB stated that, "although the reprimand saddened him," SzGy was not affected negatively by it in his work as a functionary and as a member of the party, on the contrary ... Therefore, the KEB expunged SzGy's reprimand.

Having worked in the Ministry of Domestic Trade and in the Kecskemét Cannery Company (Hungary's major canning factory for fruit and vegetable), SzB became, by the second half of the 1970s, the chairman of UNIVER ÁFÉSZ of Kecskemét, probably the most important food and grocery retailer in Bács-Kiskun County (organized as a consumer cooperative). SzB was among those functionaries who found it hard to resist his craving for "style furniture" (*stílbútor*) or what was often called "colonial" furniture and had the Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP to produce for him such furniture to the tune of Forint 80,000 in the 1970s, the sum was somewhere between one and one-and-a-half year's salary that SzB may have earned. But thanks to the generosity of Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP's director, CsL, he received the furniture free of charge; he did not even need to pay for the material costs of the company. KEB disciplinary measure in 1983 was "reprimand," but even in this case, three years later, having considered that "Comrade Sz. is a good and dynamic leader" and that he "learned the lessons from his punishment," the reprimand was expunged.

We could go on relating the details of a great number of additional cases brought to the KEB, but by now it should be obvious what they all witness to: whether or not greed had driven them to missteps and excesses that landed them in courts and/or in the disciplinary procedures of their party, members of the party-state apparatus class were driven in their everyday practices and in conducting their private life by a powerful acquisitive lust. For each individual case that came to the attention and provoked the intervention of the KEB, or even those that made their way to court rooms, there were thousands of other functionaries at various levels of the party-state hierarchies who stayed within the guardrails of "socialist legality" and communist morals and, at the same time, more or less successfully pursued objectives, personal material advances that defined at the time a *classy and good life*: larger apartments or houses, pompous "colonial" furniture at least in the living room, summer houses, dachas with lion statuettes at the entrance, foreign travels, hunting, and so on. If their acquisitive adventures led them beyond the domain of what was deemed still acceptable and tolerable morally and legally, it

was partly because socialist economies with their chronic shortages were almost never geared to satisfying consumer desires, partly because the functionaries' desires were far in excess of what they could afford (we saw how early the party leadership started worrying about functionaries amassing large debts as they couldn't resist the temptation to purchase things on borrowed money) and partly because they just felt *entitled*. When Dezső Lakatos, the head of the Central Committee's Department of Party Economy and Administrations (PGO), tried to persuade economic leaders of the Budapest district party organizations that they should try and curb the demands for economic-social privileges for the party functionaries, he said this: "We have to admit, we [members of the party apparatus] are not different from the average person in any respect—*except, perhaps, in that we have undertaken more in building socialism.*"⁸ If the reader wonders—no, it is not probable that Dezső Lakatos read George Orwell's *Animal Farm* or, indeed, any other work of Orwell. While we have to point out and register that the central committee department head's slip of the tongue does reveal the deep-seated and widespread sense of entitlement in the communist party-state's apparatus class, we shouldn't deny the relevance of the question: In what respect there was no difference between the "average person" and the party-state's functionary?

KÁDÁR'S SOCIAL CONTRACT AND THE ADVENT OF ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY

In less than two decades, not only the party-state apparatus class but also Hungarian society as a whole assumed a complexion very different from the one it had in the first half of the 1950s. What differed was partly tangible advances in terms of material well-being, improved housing, the growth of "mechanized households" (refrigerators, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, etc.) or the manifold increase in the number of privately owned personal cars and summer houses. But even more significant was the change in terms of the spread and consolidation of consumerist values, practices, and patterns of behavior. The iconic (fetishized) status various commodities assumed was a clear indication and an inevitable corollary of the advent of consumerism. All this was duly registered in several popular contemporary satirical commentaries made various genres. The single most famous and popular confrencier of post-1956 Budapest Cabaret, Dezső Kellér, noticed this tendency as early as in 1959. Browsing short "histories" of "Western" items from the nylon stockings and chewing gum to Coca Cola, he gently wondered what good it did that in almost all of these cases ideologues and propagandists first had taken the trouble to try and stigmatize these goods as "sinful apples from

the Western Paradise," when the consuming public's frenzy for them still tended to prevail in the shape of (imports, or) domesticated editions (like the state-socialist mutation of Coke, the Vita Kola), and then with the whole-hearted support of advertising of the socialist retail.⁹ Kellér's commentary rightly emphasized the changeability through time of the adored objects of consumerist desire. But the personal car, no doubt, came to be paramount among them and remained so throughout the Kádár era. Indeed, the history of mobility—and the prominent role of the personal car in it—could be seen as probably the most revealing epitome offering itself for the study and understanding of the patterns and nature of the modern everyday asserting itself in János Kádár's Hungary from the end of the 1950s and on.

In 1980, a congregation of leading social scientists and ideologues were considering and assessing Hungary's development in the decade that just had passed. Iván T. Berend was one of them, and he was looking back upon the 1970s in the following way: "The expanding, greyish, pre-fabricated residential blocks of housing estates and the Trabant, no longer entirely inaccessible for an average person, have become the proofs of an immense leap forward, but they signify at the same time the hardships in finding new solutions, except for the pathetic imitation of the rightly critiqued 'consumer society'."¹⁰ Berend's statement articulates a contemporary headache asserting itself even among reform-communist circles with regard to the advances of the modern everyday in state-socialist society. It is important to note that the hangover was twofold. It was caused partly by (a) the meager results of modernization and partly by (b) the fact that this "immense [and-yet-so pathetic] leap forward" was but an imitation of the Western (capitalist) model of modernity, which is the only possible meaning in the given context of the admission to have failed in "finding new solutions." In other words, Berend had been troubled not only by the poor performance of state-socialist "consumer society" (i.e., by the Trabant, instead of, say, Fiat 500 or Volkswagen Beetle) but also by the obvious inability of the communist countries to create an alternative, "systemically correct," socialist civilization.

To my knowledge, he never raised the question though of why and in what way Eastern Europe's state-socialist societies clung to such paths of development as would qualify them as pathetic epigones of contemporary capitalism. If, indeed, we can talk about the imitation of capitalist patterns, we should perhaps also ask what happened, along the road, to the project of a socialist society. What happened to the Utopia that, according to the official view, had been turned into science by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels?

At the end of the 1950s and in the early 1960s, N.S. Khrushchev took a serious interest in the issue. The background to this is to be found in

the ambitions of the Soviet leadership to catch up and outdo Western (American) societies in terms of living standards and consumption. In the spring of 1960, during his visit to Paris, he was asked when the Soviet Union would catch up with Western societies in terms of the number and density of personal cars. Khrushchev believed such a question could only spring from an ignorance concerning the very nature of socialist society, where the boosting of collective transportation and of a collective pool of personal cars (taxis and rental cars) constituted, in his view, the specifically *socialist* path of development of modern personal transportation. He told his French audience this:

Under such a system of car use we will obviously need 10–15 times less cars in comparison with the case where the ambition would be to provide everybody with a car. We will meet people's needs for [a] car in a more rational manner. After all, people are not tramps. People work, and while they work, the car is parked. While it is parked, it does not do any good, although its age increases just as much. We would regard it, therefore, as quite irrational to allow a wasteful increase in the number of cars. For us, the capitalist use of the car, based on private ownership, is a path to be avoided. We will provide [for] our population in a socialist manner.¹¹

Significantly, even while Khrushchev was in power, the reception of these ideas in Hungary amounted to what could best be described as a repressive silence. At the end of 1957, the total number of personal cars in Hungary was less than 13,000. Less than a third of these cars (3,980) were owned by private individuals while the owner of the rest was the socialist state. By 1970, the total stock of personal cars in the country had grown to almost 240,000, with an overwhelming share (over 89%) consisting of privately owned cars. Ten years later, the share of privately owned cars was close to 97% within a total stock of over 1 million personal cars.

At the beginning of the quarter of a century following 1956, alternative paths to develop modern mobility could still have been considered, and perhaps even asserted by central planners. In 1960, the density of personal cars (number of cars per thousand inhabitants) was three in Hungary, 40 times less than in France, 33 times less than in Britain, and eleven times less than in Italy. Modernity as “motorization” via the growth of the number of personal cars in private hands was still only a distant possibility and not a necessity. With this background in mind, Khrushchev's idea does not strike one as having come at an ill-chosen moment. In fact, it could not have come with any better timing. It came when an alternative form of motorization, one that emphasized collective transportation, yet met the demands for individual mobility through well-developed services rendered by taxi and rental companies (and/or other forms of car-sharing) instead of privately owned cars, could rightly be regarded

as feasible. By the 1970s and 1980s, however, the inertia of private mass automobilism had grown overwhelming. In the 1960s, personal cars constituted the fastest-growing sector of personal transportation and their share in the total of personal transport grew from a mere 4.3% in 1950 (and even less in 1960!) to more than 26% percent by 1972 (see table 3.1).¹²

It seems, therefore, that if we are to understand why in János Kádár's Hungary modern mobility emerged along Western patterns rather than a state-socialist *Sonderweg*, a systemic alternative, we need to be able to answer another question: Why was Khrushchev's vision of a genuinely state-socialist solution of national car-sharing sidelined? I can list several closely interrelated and partly overlapping explanations.

The peoples of Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe by the end of the 1950s had been tired of promises and even more of demands to subject their everyday life to solutions that had been deemed systemically correct but that had consistently failed to deliver any tangible improvements. As we have just seen in the Hungarian case, following the rebellious 1950s, communist leaders seemed to have understood the urgent need to actually deliver in terms of higher living standards and to upgrade issues pertinent to consumption on their agenda. Khrushchev himself launched the policies of the New Course and had a famously big mouth in the so-called Kitchen Debate, in 1959, when he told his rather irreverent opponent, Vice President Richard Nixon this: "We have existed not quite forty-two years and in another seven years we will be on the same level as America. When we catch you up, in passing by, we will wave to you."¹³ It did not even take a full two years for Brezhnev and Kosygin, having put Khrushchev out of the way, to conclude what Averell Harriman called

Table 3.1. Growth and Structure of Personal Transport Performance (Measured in Passenger-Kilometers) (Percentages)

	<i>Railways</i>	<i>Motorbikes</i>	<i>Personal Cars</i>	<i>Buses</i>	<i>Total</i>
1950	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Relative share within total</i>	<i>75.5</i>	<i>4.3</i>	<i>4.3</i>	<i>15.9</i>	<i>100</i>
1960	187	436	209	417	241
<i>Relative share within total</i>	<i>58.8</i>	<i>9.9</i>	<i>3.7</i>	<i>27.6</i>	<i>100</i>
1970	207	1351	2256	878	450
<i>Relative share within total</i>	<i>34.8</i>	<i>12.8</i>	<i>21.3</i>	<i>31.1</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MERKUR Személygépkocsi Értékesítő Vállalat iratai [Papers of the Merkur Personal Car Retailing Company—the only firm selling personal cars in socialist Hungary], MOL XXIX-G-149, Box 46: Országos Piackutató Intézet [National Institute for Market Research], "Lakossági személygépkocsi kereslet 1980-ig" [Private demand for personal cars until 1980], Budapest, 1974, III/2 appendices # 13 & 15.

"the greatest deal of the century"¹⁴ with Fiat. This was not merely the beginning of something but also a resounding spectacle signaling an end to the Khrushchevian project of socialist mobility.

What I termed "the rebellious 1950s" had been particularly traumatic for the communist leadership in Hungary. Kádár's counterrevolutionary consolidation had a crowded agenda even without such ambitious projects as a "socialist everyday" or only a "socialist mobility" alone would have been. After the red terror, they needed to pacify Hungarian society by way of proving themselves to be genuinely anti-Stalinist in all policy fields (excepting, of course, the political monopoly of the party); by retreating from people's private lives; by accepting that people seek improvements in their living conditions and enabling them to do so, preferably in proportion to their work effort. It was no longer sinful, even less criminal to seek to achieve what was considered to be a "good life." There was also an ever-expanding domain of choices regarding lifestyles that were accepted or, at least, tolerated, if not necessarily or openly supported. The necessity to break with the Stalinist political and social order and the idea of telling (imposing on) people how to live and what should make them happy could not have struck the Kádárist leadership as a feasible combination. As is so well expressed by the cabaret artist of the time (in 1957): "Frankly, it would be good at long last to be able to live quietly, at ease and in peace! There are a lot of us who would love to have what people used to be horrified about fifty years ago: that one day would be just like the other."¹⁵

The chances of the Khrushchevian project to create a socialist civilization from above were effectively undermined also by the fact that norms and values, as well as lifestyles reflective of them travel across national and even systemic boundaries—that's why I suggested the use of the metaphor "Nylon Curtain" almost two decades ago.¹⁶ The Kádárist leadership was keenly aware of the "soft power without": the demonstration effects from the West. Indeed, this was a major argument propelling the economic reforms of the 1960s. As Rezső Nyers, the main architect of the economic reforms of the 1960s, told his colleagues in the Political Bureau in 1966:

What can we expect from the reform? More than just a few percent improvement. The alternative is that neither will our economy get the necessary investments, because we cannot find the resources, nor will the population become satisfied. . . . Should we decide against the reform, we could actually continue working with these internal contradictions—*had there not been such a [strong] desire in our people concerning their living standards, had not there been capitalist competition.* . . . What I want to say is that there is no choice. If we really look at things in depth, there is no opportunity to choose, we can only choose that this [reform] must be done.¹⁷

The economic reforms of the 1960s, in turn, by way of expanding market coordination at the expense of bureaucratic coordination and by tying individual incomes not merely to “work effort” but to the profitability of the enterprise people were employed by, further promoted the adoption of Western patterns of everyday life and mobility.

As I argue and demonstrate throughout this book, it was exactly the party-state apparatus class that acted as the prime social force yielding to and “importing” Western patterns and consumerist notions of the good life by virtue of their everyday practices and the example/model they set for the rest of society.

Finally, the political class of Kádár’s counterrevolution badly needed to achieve a new contract with Hungarian society—Kádárism’s fundamental trade-off between individual prosperity (the acceptance to pursue and the chances to achieve such prosperity) and political citizenship. It is exactly this new social contract that can be captured by taking a deeper look into the 1964 feature film *Don’t Waste the Gas!*

THE FUNCTIONARY AND THE REST: THE MESSAGE OF THE FEATURE FILM “DON’T WASTE THE GAS!”

The film’s script, based on four short stories by Imre Bencsik, was written by Imre Bencsik together with Frigyes Bán, the film’s director. The film was produced in 1964, and it premiered in the movie theaters in January 1965.

Don’t Waste the Gas! had a number of self-declared genres. The poster advertising the film at the time said it was a “film comedy” (see figure 3.1). But the Narrator (to whom we will several times return) told the movie-goers early on that what they were about to see was a “scientific educational film [*tudományos oktató film*] about the hazards inherent in automobilism [*az autózás ártalmasságáról*].”¹⁸ Finally, following the “Prelude” with the “Nervous Gentleman” who tries to find out which brand of car he should opt for when buying one, the title emerges, introducing the filmographic details, revealing yet another time the film’s intended genre:

“DON’T WASTE THE GAS! GREAT HUNGARIAN DISSUADING FILM”¹⁹

It was the “great Hungarian dissuading film” that promised, for the modest price of a movie theater ticket, to convince its public that investing the salaries of several decades into buying a car would be foolish.



Figure 3.1. The Contemporary Poster of the Film *Don't Waste the Gas!*

The film was composed of four episodes (or six, considering also the *Prelude* and *Epilogue*) each one of them with its own genre. It starts with a *burlesque* about the bad fortunes of an ornithologist who, for lack of money, buys a pre-owned, more than 20-year-old Topolino. He is then forced to cope not only with a never-ending series of bad surprises his car had in store, where breakdowns of the engine are intermittently followed either by a door flying off or by a wheel running its own course away from the car, but also with the anger and aggression of the other drivers evoked by the disturbances caused by him and his ramshackle vehicle. One of these angry drivers, himself an experienced owner of an old car, chases the ornithologist throughout the outskirts of Budapest to teach him a lesson. Eventually, however, we leave the episode as both are lying under the Topolino in an idyllic scene of male bonding occasioned by the need to repair the wretched thing.

The second episode is a *comedy* about the industrial worker whose factory is an unbearably long commute from his home and whose dream is

to be able to spend more time with his numerous kids. The prize received for an innovation enables him to buy a pre-owned car. Even though in this case the car is technically in a relatively good shape, the social pressure on the car owner, in a society the overwhelming majority of which was still without cars, turns the dream come true into a nightmare: every morning people from his neighborhood line up outside his house quarrelling with one another and expecting him to offer them a ride.

The film's last (fourth) episode is a *slapstick* where a married couple of actors engage in a childish rivalry with one another over "who is the smartest driver." Eventually, and after crashes into stone fences and into one another's cars, their conflict over driving proves to have been but a manifestation of vanity and professional jealousy of a mediocre actor over the successes of his wife who is a true celebrity.

Don't Waste the Gas! should be an interesting film for anyone trying to comprehend the contemporary social reception of budding automobilism and the emergence of consumerism under state socialism. But even in this regard what really makes it a highly interesting and intriguing film is its third episode and the role and nature of the Narrator (whose name in the film and its manuscript is Dissuader), latently present in the transitions between episodes and made quite explicit in the Epilogue.

The third episode is a *satire* about the state-owned car [*állami kocsí*]. One feature stands out and distinguishes this episode from the rest. The film never makes explicit comments on larger tendencies side by side with the story carrying the episode and its "lessons." The state car episode, however, places its story into perspective via a commentary from the Dissuader/Narrator that radically modifies the very message conveyed. The episode seems to make the rather lame proposition that the party-state's apparatus class is a lot of honest, incorruptible puritans who may be counterproductively pedantic but who abstain, as a rule, from pursuing private self-interests. The newly appointed factory director never uses the state car put at his disposal. He commutes to his job by bus, and he is of the rare kind who rejects his minister's request to go on an official trip to London and Paris because duty, as he understands it, calls him to be present at the opening ceremony of the new shower room for the factory's employees. If the character of the communist factory director requires a great deal of effort from us, viewers, to suspend our disbelief, Comrade Gál, his chauffeur is all the more credible with his unlimited appetite for public resources. First, he is shocked to find out that his new boss is a weird man who, unlike the previous director, has no mistress and has no intention of using his (the chauffeur's) services to get by car to Lake Balaton in the heat of the summer. Gál then quickly proceeds to "privatize" his director's state car to his own benefit and to do with it everything and even more than his previous boss used to do. He uses the personal car to

transport building materials to the house which is being built by himself, his father-in-law, and his newlywed wife. (Whom, by the way, he got to know by picking her up along the highway and whom he also married using his boss's car as the wedding limo.)

But the foregrounded puritan boss whose naïveté creates opportunities for the corrupt chauffeur is obviously a case constituting, as the Hungarian saying goes, "the very exception that corroborates the rule." This is what we are given to understand by the commentary with which the state car episode is introduced. Transiting from episode 2 to 3, the Dissuader-Narrator tells the public that he had already proven beyond doubt the foolishness of desiring a car. After all what has been shown, he says to the moviegoer,

you can only have one argument for the use of the personal car, Sir—hm, excuse me—Comrade!, and that is the state car. For the state car is run on state gas. The state car is driven by a state chauffeur, it is repaired at the state's costs, and it is taken care of by the service station run by the state. It is washed and cleaned every day even if only a few drops from disrespectful sparrows can be found on it. Consequently, nowhere else in the world are there as many state cars as in our country. In this respect, we have not only caught up with the leading capitalist countries but even left them behind. There, the state car is resorted to only under exceptional circumstances and only by those who are entitled to it: the top leaders of the state. In our country, the state car is used even by the manager of the smallest company, its clerks, its courier, and their families too. . . . We distinguish our state cars by special license plates so that everybody should be able to see what a large number of people hurry to do their job in this country in important state affairs. To realize this, one merely needs to observe all those state cars that pass us by along the highway towards the Lake Balaton on a hot Saturday afternoon in the Summer.²⁰

As the Dissuader-Narrator is telling this, the film manuscript carries instructions making it unmistakably clear that this tale actually is about the party-state's apparatus class rather than white collar workers of small companies of the socialist economy. The instructions require the producers to get shots of "Beautiful, black state cars (Mercedes or, at least, Volga)" and, in general, they are repeatedly emphatic about their preference for "representative" black or "dark cars with state license plates" (see figure 3.2).

In the first half of the 1960s, Mercedeses, and to some extent even Volgas, served only the comfort of the higher levels of the party and state apparatus, while the echelons closer to the commoners had to make do with the Russian Pobedas and Moskwitches, or Polish Warszawas.

What the opening sequences of the state car episode and the commentary attached to them allude to and reveal is that in the first decade of the Kádár era, at the very beginning of mass automobilism in socialist



Figure 3.2. Scene from *Don't Waste the Gas!:* State Cars Kept Clean and Serviced at the Cost of the State.

Hungary, it was the party-state's apparatus class (and its work-related and private needs for mobility) that propelled to a great extent what was the visible personal car traffic along the streets and roads in the country. Indeed, it was only in 1959 that private persons' share among the owners of the personal cars in the country climbed above 50%, and it was in the first half of the 1960s when the share of state-owned cars got gradually reduced to 20% and then, to even less, of the total stock. The relatively large fleet of personal cars serving the party-state apparatus class brought the beginning of modern, "motorized" mobility to Hungary, and this fleet (and its use for private purposes) turned the country's party-state functionaries into the first beneficiaries and the harbingers of the "good life" offered by the modernity built on individual, personal car-based mobility. Thanks to their incomes and privileges, it was this same apparatus class that became the primary beneficiary of the dynamically developing and upcoming private automobilism too. To illustrate this, I could refer to the secretary of the trade union organization of the National Office of Planning, who, in his report over the period 1971–1974, could proudly report that the employees of the office had high salaries and a steadily improving situation in terms of their general well-being: only 8% of all the employees had problems with their housing situation, 30% owned personal cars, and 23% could take their families to their private weekend houses, cabins.²¹

In the mirror of contemporary aggregate statistics (see figure 3.3), it appears, the frequency of private car ownership among central planners

Car ownership in different social strata in Hungary

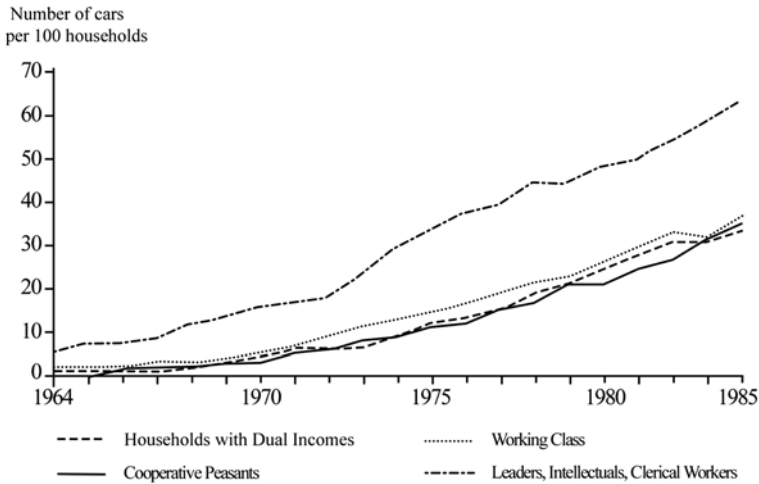


Figure 3.3. The Development of the Number of Personal Cars per 100 Households in Various Social Strata. Without data for 1984, as the statistical observation of household budget had been made biannually since 1983. Based on Mária Rédei, Keszthelyiné, Gépkocsi és életmód [The personal car and life style] ("Életszívnalfüzetek" series, nr. 8), Budapest: Statisztikai Kiadó Vállalat, July 1988. p. 13.

was more than double of what we find among workers or cooperative peasants, and significantly higher than among the entire category of "leaders, professionals, and clerical workers" (*szellemi dolgozók*).

Another approach to the tendency privileging the party-state apparatus class goes through looking at the increasing overlap between the wishy-washy statistical category of "*szellemi dolgozók*" and the functionaries. We lack aggregate statistics regarding the party-state apparatus class (it proved particularly hard to acquire comprehensive social statistics over the state side). But we have some valuable data for the party side (see table 3.2).

Putting words on what table 3.2 shows: inequalities applied not only in the world of material goods but also in the distribution and redistribution of major items of social capital, like the level of education that the upcoming generations could access. The vast overrepresentation of the party-state apparatus class in the better and best educated segments of the Hungarian population can be made clear by considering that in 1960 4.5% of Hungarians older than seven had completed secondary education and 2.5% had some kind of (complete or incomplete) higher education. The same percentages for 1970 were 8.3% and 4.3%, for 1980 13.7% and 6%, respectively.²²

Table 3.2. Highest Level of Education of the Salaried Apparatus of the Communist Party (Percentages)

	1955 (n = 7156)	1981 (n = 5845)	1989 (n = 4989)
Higher education (university or college)	10.3	44.2	57.1
Higher party schools	4.4	25.8	21.6
Secondary school	10.1	23.9	19.5
Elementary school	44.5	6.1	1.8
Incomplete elementary education	30.7	—	—
Together	100.0	100.0	100.1

Sources: For 1955 – József Bíró (Hungarian Workers' Party, Central Committee, Department of Party- and Mass Organizations), "Tájékoztató jelentés a függetlenített pártfunkcionáriusok összetételének alakulásáról (1955. december 31.-i állapot)" [Report concerning the composition of salaried, full-time party functionaries as of December 31, 1955], dated May 5, 1956, marked "Strictly Confidential." *MOL* 276. f. 89. cs. 42. 6e. For 1981 and 1989 – Ferenc Gazsó, "A káderbürokrácia és az értelmiség" [The cadres bureaucracy and the intellectuals], *Társadalmi Szemle*, no. 1055 (November 1990), p. 7

These developments were, of course, far from unproblematic, and not only because of the obvious inequality they had brought with them. The variant of modernity emerging in the field of mobility in Hungary reminded everyone too much of what was regarded to be characteristic for the capitalist societies, because it emphasized individualism as opposed to collectivism (*vide* Iván T. Berend's concern about "the hardships in finding new solutions" quoted earlier) and it privileged personal cars as opposed to collective (mass) transportation. There was certainly precious little "socialism" about the kind of mobility patterns emerging in the wake of modernization in Hungary. Then, the upsurge of private automobilism in the 1960s caused some shorter term economic headaches too: Hungary did not produce personal cars, and the increasing car imports weighed heavily on the balances of foreign trade and international payments, thus constantly challenging communist reflexes that tended to prioritize the interests of production and productive investments over consumption.

Now we may return to our film and ask why and who should think that the Hungarian consumer should be dissuaded from buying car. Whose genre is "the great Hungarian dissuading film"? Of course, it is the paternalistic socialist state (its apparatus class) talking to the consumer citizen telling him/her "Don't waste your money and nerves on the car!" It presents its dissuasion in a highly rationalistic, detached manner, as it befits a "scientific educational film," which is yet again a subtle reference to the avant-garde of a social order based on a "scientific world view," scientific socialism, side by side with numerous other instances where contemporary political language and discourses of Marxism–Leninism are used (and twisted) by the filmmakers.²³

But, as almost all the contemporary reviewers noticed,²⁴ the film as a propaganda piece of dissuasion proved a spectacular failure. What explains this is not so much the substandard craftsmanship in agitation-and-propaganda, but rather the profound ambiguity prevalent in the attitude of Hungary's ruling apparatus class toward automobility. After all, they could not both enjoy the comforts of private automobility in their public (and, increasingly, private) cars and deny, at the same time, the same pleasure for the rest of society. This ambiguity, however, is not inherent in the filmmakers' attitude as suggested by some contemporary critics, rather it is part of the "subject matter" of the film, of the world it attempted to make us laugh at, and thus part of the insights it tried to communicate to its viewers.

For the Dissuader-Narrator is no one else than the Kádárist mutant of *Comrade Kucsera*, Gyula Háy's much hated functionary of the Rákosi era. Perhaps, he was not much more lovable, being still corrupt and egoistic, but certainly more generous and tolerant toward the commoners than his Rákosist-Stalinist counterpart had ever been. He lifts a finger of warning, he tries to teach, but he is too weak himself to resist the temptations of a "good life." A fact that he also publicly admits. Indeed, and most importantly, this new Kádárist Kucsera is even capable of self-irony as is demonstrated by the Epilogue of the movie. The team of actors and actresses, having been engaged in the production of a long hour's "dissuasion," are leaving Studio 3 of the MAFILM. Each one of them is getting into and driving off in her/his own car. Even the Dissuader-Narrator (Ervin Kibédi) walks to a car and, in a moment of clarity, as he realizes that the camera is still live and has been following him, he turns toward us, looks into our eyes with a slight embarrassment, then shrugs his shoulders and lifts his finger to his lips as if telling us "OK, you've caught me, but psst, please don't tell anyone!" (see figure 3.4).

Another fact is just as significant here: the car he is taking is a black Chevrolet Bel Air 1957 (see figure 3.5). Indeed, this is the most elegant, "representative" car in the whole film and, what is more important, it is the only car that really satisfies the wishes of the authors of the film's script for the state car episode to use "beautiful, black, state . . . car[s] . . . (Mercedes or, at least, Volga)."²⁵ Of the 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air, there were altogether 73 cars in Hungary at the time. Sixty-six of these served the comfort of functionaries of the communist party-state, while seven belonged to diplomats working in Budapest and a couple of private owners. Of the 66 state cars, the single largest post (13) belonged to the Central Committee apparatus of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.²⁶ The "officialdom" of the Dissuader-Narrator is clearly revealed also by the fact that he performs his duty always in a dark suit, white shirt, and tie—at the time, all unmistakable markers of the functionary.



Figure 3.4. Scene from *Don't Waste the Gas!*: The "Dissuader" entering his car, asking the viewers not to reveal his (their) "secret."

No doubt, *Don't Waste the Gas!* is a movie that, with a critical edge, makes us, the viewers, laugh at the prevalent sociopolitical order and at its main beneficiaries (as well as some of its losers). Artistic work of this sort from the communist era we tend with little hesitation to put either into the category of "subversive weapon" or "pressure valve." But *Don't Waste the Gas!* fails to fit the bill for either of these categories. What the Hungarian public was laughing at forgivingly was the profound complicity between themselves and the apparatus class of the Kádárist (reform communist) social order. They both shared the desires of the modern individualist consumer, and they both craved the lifestyle enabled and embodied by modern personal car-based private mobility. Consumerism and, in general, modern everyday as it emerged in post-1956 communist Hungary was thus not merely a story about the Kádárian "carrot" gradually replacing Rákosi's "whip" but also about an understanding of a "good life" shared, commonly accepted, and pursued by the ruled and rulers alike.

Inasmuch as *Don't Waste the Gas!* was engaged in dissuasion, in an attempt to curb the consumerist acquisitive lust, it was no doubt a contribution on behalf of state-socialist cultural production to assist citizens in coping with demand-side abundance. The filmmakers made a gesture of standing in the way of the rise of consumerist desires (the iconic object of which, East and West, was the personal car) under conditions of chronic shortages. As we have seen, however, dissuasion was an agenda of the film that the filmmakers themselves were laughing at and made the moviegoers laugh at too. The Narrator-Dissuader, having preached throughout the film against the desire for a car, offered nothing but highly rational arguments, like a good soldier of Marxist-Leninist enlightenment and propaganda should. Eventually, however, he too reveals himself to



Figure 3.5. Scene from *Don't Waste the Gas!*: The "Dissuader" (Narrator) is leaving MAFILM's Studio 3 in his Chevrolet Bel Air.

have been just as fallible as any of the commoners, just as vulnerable to the consumerist temptation. Admitting the sin this time was the way of offering absolution to all the sinners. Thereby, the Narrator-Dissuader and its public, the functionary and the rest, find themselves in one and the same community which was the very meaning of the Kádárist social contract.

NOTES

1. For a complete documentation of the affair (1967–1971), see Central Control Commission [KEB] of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party [MSZMP], MOL 932 f. 1967/III/1/5/2.

2. The Hungarian Workers' Militia [*Munkásőrség*] was an armed paramilitary organization established in early 1957 by the Kádár regime in response to the threat of a possible recurrence of the 1956 revolution. Its members were recruited on a voluntary basis from all walks of society.

3. Every district in Budapest and in the provincial cities had such a construction company taking care of the maintenance of large stocks of municipally owned residential houses in the country.

4. For KH's KEB investigation and its full documentation, see MSZMP KEB papers, MOL 932. f., dossier nr. 1964/5, fols. 1–7.

5. The documentation of the KEB disciplinary procedure against BL: MSZMP KB, KEB papers, MOL 932. F. 1984 – VIII/9/5.

6. The complete documentation of all the cases related to the Kecskemét MEZŐGÉP affair is to be found in MSZMP KB KEB, minutes of KEB's December 15, 1986 meeting. MOL 932. F. 1986 – I/9/2/1.

7. In the 1960s, the craze among the party-state's functionaries for "colonial furniture" spread like a forest fire after a period of high temperatures and drought. In 1960, *Család és Iskola* (Family and School, the monthly magazine published by the Ministry of Education) was still ridiculing the rich of the old, pre-1945 regime in Hungary that they furnished their children's room with colonial furniture with strict rules and controls of behavior to protect the furniture from damages caused by the kids (cf. György Fenyves, "Legyen gyermekszobája . . ." [Let him have a children's room . . .], *Család és Iskola* XI, no. 3 [March 1960]). In the decades thereafter, however, daily papers as well as various weekly and monthly magazines featured abundant advertisements from both producers, sellers, and buyers of "koloniál" furniture (meaning heavy, handmade, expensive furniture produced imitating various old "artistic styles," such as Baroque, Biedermeier, Classic, Rococo, etc.), showing a flourishing market.

8. Dezső Lakatos's response to the comments by participants in the meeting held for heads of the party economy and administration departments of the Budapest district party organizations – Minutes, July 29, 1959, *BFL*, MSZMP Budapesti Bizottságának Archívuma, XXXV (1) f. 21. őe., 11. Emphasis added.

9. Dezső Kellér, "Vita kola – Coca cola," in *Pest az Pest* [Budapest is Budapest—selected conferences and sketches, 1946–1964] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1967), 160–162.

10. Iván T. Berend, "Utunk a hetvenes évtizedig" [Our road to the 1970s] in *Az 1970-es évtized a magyar történelemben* [The Decade of the 1970s in Hungarian History], ed. Pál Zsigmond Pach et al. (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1980), 33.

11. *Pravda*, April 2, 1960 – quoted by A. J. Koseljov, *Személyi tulajdon a szocializmusban* (Personal Ownership under Socialism) (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1964), 182. For more on Khrushchev's "socialist car" policies and their fate, consult Lewis Siegelbaum, *The Faustian bargain of the Soviet automobile*, Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies, nr. XXIV (Trondheim, Programme on East European Cultures and Societies, January 2008) and Lewis Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

12. All the data above (and more) are provided with sources identified in: György Péteri, "Streetcars of Desire: Cars and Automobility in Communist Hungary (1958–1970)," *Social History* 34, no. 1 (2009): 2–5.

13. For what was said in the exchanges between Nixon and Khrushchev on July 24, 1959, see <http://www3.sympatico.ca/robsab/debate.html> (accessed latest on February 1, 2016).

14. "Il piu grande a fare del secolo" as told by Valerio Castronovo in his *Fiat 1899–2005. Una storia del capitalismo italiano* [Fiat 1899–2005. A story of Italian capitalism] (Milano: Rizzoli, 2005), 518.

15. Dezső Kellér, "Ötvenéves a kabaré" [The Fiftieth Anniversary of Cabaret], in *Pest az Pest* [Budapest is Budapest – selected conferences and sketches, 1946–1964] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1967), 124.

16. György Péteri, “Nylon Curtain – Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East Central Europe,” *Slavonica* 10, no. 2 (2004): 113–123.

17. Minutes of the May 3, 1966, meeting of the Political Bureau of the MSZMP, agenda nr. 4, “Javaslat a gazdasági reformmal kapcsolatos szervezeti változtatásokra” (Suggestions for organizational changes in connection with the economic reforms – presented by Central Committee Secretary and Political Bureau member Rezső Nyers), *MOL M-KS* 288. F. 5/394. őe., Emphasis added.

18. Imre Bencsik and Frigyes Bán, *Kár a benzinért!* [Don’t waste the gas!] (Mimeographed film script produced in 110 copies, copy in the author’s possession) (Budapest: Stúdió 3, 1963), shot # 6, 11.

19. *Ibid.*, shot # 7, 12.

20. *Ibid.*, 99 ff.

21. György Cserhalmi, secretary of the trade union committee of the National Office of Planning [OT], “Az OT dolgozóinak szociális helyzete, a szakszervezet ilyen irányú tevékenysége” [The social situation of OT employees and the relevant activities of the trade union – Report to the Executive Committee of the MSZMP party committee at the OT, discussed on the latter’s October 23, 1974, meeting], October 17, 1974. *BFL*, Documents of the MSZMP Budapest Committee, XXXV/10. f. C, 232. őe., 1–4.

22. Cf. the statistics for the level of education in Hungary, 1920–2011, made accessible online by Hungary’s Central Office of Statistics at https://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/tablak_iskolazottsag -- last accessed on May 26, 2023.

23. See, e.g., the Dissuader’s introduction to the state car episode (cf. Bencsik and Bán, *Kár a benzinért!*, shot # 48, 103), where he tells the moviegoers that with respect to the number of passenger cars serving the apparatus class, “we have not only caught up with the leading capitalist countries but even left them behind,” a rather sarcastic allusion to Khrushchev’s promise to Nixon “when we catch you up, in passing by, we will wave to you.”

24. Of the twelve reviews only few had something positive to say about the film – cf. the press clippings held by the Library of the Hungarian National Film Archives, Budapest. This, however, did not deter the film from becoming a resounding public success.

25. Bencsik and Bán, *Kár a benzinért!*, shot # 48, 101.

26. For the detailed car statistics by make, model, and owners: Papers of the National Office of Planning, Classified Documents Management, *MOL*, XIX-A-16-16-b, box nr. 1907, Document nr. 00302/XVI/1964 Strictly Secret., fol. 2. The data combines the number of Bel Air and Impala models. For the cars in the MSZMP Central Committee’s possession: Economic report of the Transportation and Technological Company [*Közlekedési és Műszaki Vállalat*] MSZMP KB PGO, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1964. 12. őe., economic report for the year 1964, fols. 1–27.

Chapter 4

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Passion and Privilege

Functionaries Hunting

RULING CLASSES RUBBING SHOULDERS: THE BUDAPEST HUNTING EXPO OF 1971

The only world fair arranged by a socialist country in the Cold War era was the World Exhibition of Hunting of 1971 in Budapest. International fairs of those times were major sites of interaction between different nations and systemic “camps” (“East” and “West,” socialism and capitalism), an interaction out of which no side could come entirely unaffected. There are at least four dimensions to these interactions that need to be distinguished.¹

Fairs can be rendered as *sites of convergence* in the admittedly (and deliberately) ambiguous, contradictory sense that they promoted the mutual assimilation of norms, values, and standards, at the same time as they prompted with renewed force the efforts on both sides of the systemic divide to articulate and assert the distinct and superior nature of their own modernities.

They can also be envisaged and understood as *sites of encounters*, where different cultures (and different cultural- and social-political projects) meet one another, and where rivalry, confrontation, and contestation take place. Cold War era systemic rivalries often targeted third parties rather than the public of one-Self or of the systemic Other. Self-representations of the West and/or of the communist East intended to speak to the developing world at least as much as to the populations and elites of one another.

Organizers of the 1971 Hunting Expo in Budapest went out of their way to secure, through various subventions, a large-scale presence of the developing countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, in order, among other things, to leave visiting and exhibiting professionals from these countries with the impression that "a truly rational and highly developed wildlife management and environmental protection, in accordance with the interests of the whole society, can only be possible under socialist conditions."² Therefore, to promote these ends, it was decided early on that while all exhibitors of the Hunting Expo were expected to pay the same fees and obey the same rules, but, in case of official participation, developing countries enjoyed a discount of 50% when it came to the rental fee paid for the pavilions and/or areas of display, and the Hungarian State (via the Exhibition Bureau of the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries) covered 50% of any construction and/or operating costs incurred.³ Moreover, also for the sake of increasing the number of exhibitors from the developing world, the Hungarian organizers introduced the category of "symbolic participation." If the authorities of a developing country decided not to participate for economic reasons, they were to be offered by the Hungarian ambassador the possibility to participate symbolically, meaning that their flag would figure among the flags of exhibitors at the Expo, that the Hungarian organizers, at their own cost, would create a large display of 2 square meters for the country in question with photos and other exhibits to tell about the distinctive traits of their wildlife and hunting.⁴

Just as in other phases of modernity, Cold War era fairs were *sites of negotiation, diffusion, and transfers*. They also performed the basic role out of which modern era fairs emerged: they were marketplaces where goods, technological know-how, licenses, services, and so on, were sold and bought. Thus, they greatly contributed to the diffusion and transfer of new products, new technologies, new knowledge, new patterns of organization and creativity. Moreover, hand in hand with the exchanges of information and commodities went the negotiated diffusion across national and systemic boundaries of norms, values, and standards of industrial, economic, professional, and artistic activities.

Finally, but just as importantly, fairs with socialist pavilions and/or with socialist hosts constitute a prime subject for cultural analysis because they were also major *sites of identity formation*. Self-representations and projections (constructions of the Self) can and should be analyzed in tandem with perceptions and understandings of the (systemic and/or other kinds of) Other. We are not talking of a confrontation of entirely distinct and contrasting images, even less about the confrontation between images that had been set once and for all at a certain point of time. We are talking about an interactive process of yielding and

shaping, producing and reproducing these images within the frameworks of the fairs, not only by way of the “messages” issued in terms of the aesthetic choices made, architectural design selected, artifacts displayed, arrangements/programs of information and amusement offered, and so on, but also by way of the reception of these messages and the appropriation of the opportunities offered (intended or not) by the fairs.

As any other international fair, the World’s Fair of Hunting ’71 requires to be understood as a political, social, and cultural phenomenon of high complexity, where several, sometimes conflicting, sometimes mutually reinforcing needs and agendas were pursued and could find accommodation side by side with one another, simultaneously. This high complexity is evident even in terms of the human agency that made the exhibition happen. The world’s fair of hunting could not have been what it was without the parts played by the political and administrative elites of foreign countries and Hungary, by the hunters contributing to and visiting what was on display, by the artists, architects, and professionals of hunting and wildlife management designing and staging the expo and by the commoners (domestic and foreign) visiting, “consuming,” and enjoying the spectacle.

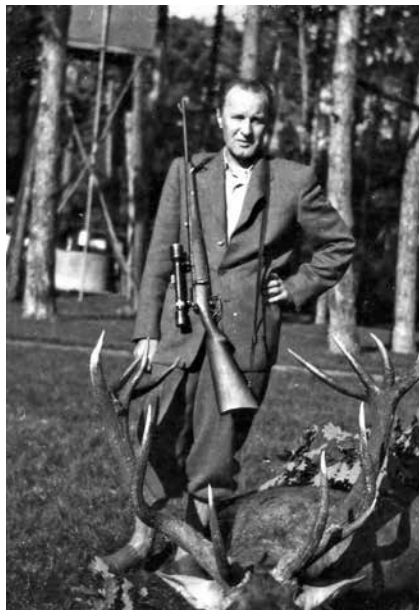


Figure 4.1. János Kádár with a Red Deer Stag, 1957. *Source:* Fortepan / Gossányi András, Photo nr. 217151.

Hungary's "communist elites" did not constitute a politically homogeneous entity, especially not after August 1968, the invasion of a reform-communist brother country, Czechoslovakia. In itself an indication of the strength of Hungary's reform-communism, the conservative backlash following 1968 took much time and a great deal of effort to assert itself in Budapest. In 1971, the liberally oriented reform-communist positions had been challenged but still strong, not the least those of the so-called Agrarian Lobby. From the very beginning (1966), the World's Fair of Hunting was their project and pulling it off should be seen as a demonstration of their power and prowess. In this network, mighty politicians, like member of the Political Bureau and Deputy Head of Government Lajos Fehér, Minister of Agriculture and Food Industries Imre Dimény, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, and War-time communist partisan László Földes went together with top administrators and able professionals of wildlife management, like Sándor Tóth, and with such highly competent ancient regime professionals of hunting and forestry as Ákos Szederjei, László Studinka, and several others, at home, as well as abroad. In fact, the very idea of arranging a world expo of hunting in Hungary was broached in elite circles by László Földes but came originally from Dr. Endre Nagy, an outstanding professional hunter and entrepreneur of wildlife management, who started his career in the 1930s, was forced to flee from Hungary after years of imprisonment in 1952, and ended up in Tanzania as the director of one of Africa's largest, professionally managed wildlife reserve. Thus, the project of the world's fair was not merely about socialist Hungary defining and staging herself as a modern society of high sophistication well integrated into transnational and transsystemic networks of professionals and professional organizations of environmental protection, forestry, hunting, and wildlife management, but also about socialist Hungary reaching out across and transcending another systemic divide: the one that had been separating it from its own non-socialist past.

Each of the above listed aspects was of genuine relevance in the case of Expo '71. However, what I want to foreground in the present context is a seldom discussed layer of "convergence": the World Exhibition of Hunting was also a site where Hungary's state-socialist ruling class met and rubbed shoulders with the hegemonic classes of other nations and socio-political systems, sharing with them their passion for the old and noble pastime of hunting. Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, Queen Elizabeth II's husband,⁵ Lord Inglewood, the British pavilion's commissioner,⁶ Monsieur Dauchez, Madame Rothschild, and Monsieur Chaumat, high-ranking officials and notable members of the *Société de Vénérerie* (the French national organization of hunting with dog packs, *chasse à courre*),⁷ Daniel Jenssen, president of the Association of Belgian Chemical Industries, Baron Edmond de Potesta, president of the Royal Belgian St. Hubert

Hunting Club,⁸ Belgian Deputy Prime Minister André Cools, and many other formally and/or informally high-ranking and influential personalities of West-European and North American (capitalist) societies visited and some even actively participated in bringing together their national pavilions and in the various activities in and around Expo '71.

Western aristocratic elites were joined by sizeable groups of higher middle-class people, with hunting as their hobby, and ones who ever since the late 1950s have been increasingly aware and appreciative of the hunting opportunities communist Hungary offered.⁹

Many of the higher ranking visitors to Expo '71 were received by the Hungarian high commissioner of the exhibition (László Földes, deputy minister of Agriculture and Food Industries) or, even, deputy prime minister Lajos Fehér, both of them very active and passionate hunters. Hunting excursions were also arranged to be offered to a select few, on some of the finest hunting grounds of the country—as the organizers saw to it that the timing of the exhibition (August 27, 1971–September 30, 1971) at least partly overlapped with the main (Autumn) hunting season.

Then, of course, a massive crowd of high- and medium-ranking representatives of the party-state apparatus classes from other communist countries came to visit the exhibition. Many of their top leaders, like L. I. Brezhnev, the general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, political bureau members, central committee secretaries, members of government, and so on, found it important enough to show up in Budapest. As a rule, members of the Hungarian Government (ministers), the state secretaries, as well as the top party leadership invited their counterparts in the socialist countries to visit the exhibition, and the response was overwhelmingly positive. A standard source with the help of which all the VIP visitors of Expo '71 can be identified is the series of confidential daily reports (*Napi Jelentések*) sent to the leading officers of the exhibition by the various units. Indeed, a list of all the names of visiting functionaries from the Soviet Bloc figuring in the *Daily Reports* looks like the upper echelons of a combined "Warsaw Pact nomenklatura."¹⁰

BY NOW THE READER MUST HAVE GROWN CURIOUS: "COMMUNISTS AND HUNTING? REALLY?!"

Early in this millennium, sociologist Tibor Huszár published a book with the title *Conversations with Rezső Nyers*. In one of the few truly interesting exchanges, Nyers, who as a politburo member and central committee secretary was the architect of the liberalizing economic reforms in the 1960s, was asked: "Did you go hunting? Biszku¹¹ was a passionate hunter." Nyers answered as follows: "No, I did not hunt. I did two sports—I swam



Figure 4.2. Excited and Mischievously Jolly: János Kádár, L. I. Brezhnev, and Dr. Sándor Tóth are emerging from the Bulgarian Pavilion of the World Hunting Exhibition, Budapest, 1971. At the center of the photo is L. I. Brezhnev, behind and left of him, the merry gentleman is Dr. Sándor Tóth (Head of the Chief Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management in the Ministry of Agriculture, the Protocol Hunter organizing, among others, the collective hunts for the Egyetértés Club). The lady in between and behind Kádár and Brezhnev is Kádár's loyal and long-trusted Russian interpreter, Mrs Nadia Barta, the top of a man's head behind her belongs to László Földes, the Hungarian Government's Commissioner of the World Hunting Exhibition, member of Egyetértés on the basis of exception. The gentleman with glasses behind Kádár is Dr. Imre Dimény, the Minister of Agriculture. *Source:* MTI – photo by Ferenc Vigovszki.

in the morning or in the evening, and I played tennis.”¹² For anyone not entirely uninitiated regarding the everyday and private life of the party-state apparatus class, this was an astonishing response which put Nyers and his “outlying” personality among the functionaries of the communist party state in a stark relief. His case was one of the few exceptions, not the rule.

THE PLACE OF HUNTING AMONG THE PASTIMES OF THE APPARATUS CLASS

For, as a matter of fact, hunting was the single-most wide-spread pastime among communist leaders and the party-state apparatus class, and this



Figure 4.3. At a Battue. Top military leaders and leading functionaries of the Administrative Department of the Hungarian Workers' Party Central Committee, probably from 1960 to 1961. Photo probably from 1960 to 1961. *Source:* Author's private collection.

did not apply exclusively to Hungary's case. Erik Honecker, Josip Broz Tito, Nicolae Ceausescu, Todor Zhivkov, or L. I. Brezhnev, and the apparatuses over which they presided, were just as passionate hunters as János Kádár and his underlings.

Yet, the phenomenon requires some believing on account of its seeming implausibility. After all, hunting in Hungary (and in most of the countries of Eastern Europe) was a recreational activity intimately associated, in the public imagination of the ancient regime as well as of the postwar communist era, with elite groups considered by communists to have been the most reactionary (landed) components of the former ruling classes (aristocrats and the "gentry"). The news about functionary hunters might come as a surprise also because the activities of Hungary's top leaders received no publicity whatever at the time. While newspaper readers in the 1920s would always know where and with whom the prime minister (Count István Bethlen) had been hunting and the number of deers or boars he had shot,¹³ the only news to reach the broad Hungarian public about First Secretary János Kádár's recreational activities (see figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, and 4.5) was a short communiqué, most often in the period July–August, revealing that Comrade Kádár had commenced his annual, ordinary vacation.¹⁴

Nomenklatura hunting and its "achievements" were consistently kept away from public eyes. An episode typical for this is as follows: The



Figure 4.4. The Old Hunter: János Kádár on one of his last hunting excursions, 1987. Source: Fortepan / Fortepan/Album059, Photo nr. 217260.

Egyetértés (Concord) Hunting Club was established in the early 1960s by, and exclusively for the top of the power elite including members of the communist party's political bureau and secretariat, members of the government (ministers and state secretaries) and the top leaders of other major institutions of state power (the presidential council of the People's Republic, the chairman of the Parliament, the Attorney General, the chairman of the Supreme Court, and the president of the Hungarian National Bank).¹⁵ *Egyetértés* circulated among its members a satirical, illustrated newsletter issued annually on the occasion of the club's end-of-the-year party. Its title was *Fácán Matyi*. Under a mocking version of the title of the official satirical weekly cartoonist magazine, *Ludas Matyi*, they in fact relied on the work of some of *Ludas* cartoonists to produce cartoons included in the newsletter. One of FM's issues scornfully cites the wording of a news item carried by the tabloid daily, *Esti Hírlap*: "20 fallow bucks were brought down during the October hunting season in Gyulaj, the famous reserve. Two native hunters have shot bucks with antlers weighing 4.37 and 4.46 kilograms, which are outstanding even among those winning gold medals. Indeed, they are not far off the world record trophies." On the illustration attached to the news (a cartoon with inserts of photos of the faces of the hunters), politburo members Lajos Fehér and Béla Biszku are dancing *csárdás* in folk dresses and boots, with a sub-text saying "Two native hunters have shot beyond the world record."¹⁶ The text obviously referred to the fact that Fehér had twice shot fallow bucks with world record antlers in Gyulaj,¹⁷ and so did probably even Biszku,

although he, unlike Fehér or Kádár, never donated his trophies to the Museum of Agriculture.

Kádár himself had a rather ambivalent attitude toward publicity in this respect. On the one hand, he was proud of his achievements as a hunter: he had quite a few high class, even gold medal trophies, and he did not at all mind if they were included in exhibitions or/and professional publications.¹⁸ On the other hand, he rejected the offer of a skillful game painter to produce a painting of a beautiful roe deer buck he shot in 1973. Kádár's arguments were as follows:

As the hunter who shot the game is me, and as the whole matter concerns my person, I have to say in a straightforward manner that such a painting would make it very hard for me to continue hunting, the only leisure that gives me genuine recreation. Other considerations, connected with my official responsibilities [más—funkciómmal összefüggő— meggondolások], make the offer completely unacceptable for me.

Kádár begged for the painter's understanding and forgiveness.¹⁹ To figure in the trophy lists of the National Directorate of Forestry or in the trophy exhibitions of the Agricultural Museum was still compatible with the self-image of a semi-professional hunter who, in his work contributing to the plan targets of agricultural exports, "happens" to shoot one or another game with an extraordinary trophy. A painting of his gold medal buck, however, even if only the buck would have been painted, had easily been seen as a celebration of the might of the country's number one political personality—thus, his hunting would have been pulled into the public domain and its meaning would have lost its integrity, and its status as an immaculately *private* leisure would have been compromised. Kádár enjoyed his power and seldom hesitated to wield it, but he was also keen on preventing the emergence of any "cult of the personality" around him which, in his eyes, was crucially dependent on the maintenance of a clear distinction between the private and public spheres of his activities.

But the veil hiding nomenklatura hunting cannot prevent us from establishing the fact that hunting was extremely popular among communist elites and the apparatus class. For the year 1971, we have a detailed report on the activities in the Egyetértés Hunting Club.²⁰ In that year, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (the top of political power in communist Hungary) had altogether 15 members. Eight of these fifteen were members of Egyetértés and visited regularly the five estates belonging to the club. Egyetértés had exclusive access to Hungary's best hunting reserves: Gemenc, Telki, Gyulaj, Mezőföld, and Gödöllő. In the following tables (see tables 4.1 and 4.2), I will present some of the main parameters of their use of the resources in Egyetértés. We'll look at the number of days they visited the estates of Egyetértés, the number of (small



Figure 4.5. János Kádár with a Mouflon Buck, 1960. *Source:* Fortepan / Fortepan/ Album059, Photo nr. 217256.

and big) game they shot, as well as at some indicators of the extent to which they could use the infrastructure and resources of Egyetértés to the benefits of their relatives and other guests.

A comparison with national averages sets the accessibility and “efficiency” of hunting for this top elite in sharp contrast: according to calculations by the Hungarian National Association of Hunters (MAVOSZ) from 1979, the average recreational hunter in Hungary spent 26 days annually with hunting and his bag carried no more than three pieces of big and fifty pieces of small game.²¹ For all the sixty members of the Egyetértés Club, the average number of hunting days was 24, while the average bag carried 29 pieces of big game and 247 pieces of small game in 1971.

While members of Egyetértés spent altogether 1,452 hunting days²² at their five estates, they also invited domestic guests (1,144 guest days) as well as guests from abroad (214 guest days). Our data allow us to show the extent to which families, friends, and colleagues of each individual Politburo member listed above could enjoy the resources of Egyetértés.

When hunting becomes a passion, it puts a heavy tax on the hunter’s weekends, and thus on his family and/or marriage. The need to somehow strike a balance between hunting and familial/parental duties will present itself. Taking wives and children to the hunt (or, at least, to the

Table 4.1. The Amount of Time Politburo Members Devoted to Hunting and the Size of their Annual Game Bag

<i>PB Members</i>	<i>Number of Days Spent Hunting</i>	<i>Number of Big Games Shot</i>	<i>Number of Small Games Shot</i>
György Aczél	69	72	6
Antal Apró	14	33	0
Béla Biszku	38	38	201
Lajos Fehér	21	20	220
Jenő Fock	90	205	21
Sándor Gáspár	54	12	2,764
János Kádár	16	12	797
Károly Németh	40	57	1,366
TOTAL	342	449	5,375
AVERAGE	43	56	672

Source: On the basis of data from “Jelentés az Állami Erdő- és Vadgazdaságok 1971. évi működéséről” [Report on the Operation of State Farms of Forestry and Wildlife Management] by Dr. Sándor Tóth, Head of the Main Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries, Budapest, January 31, 1972. Document in Dr. Sándor Tóth’s possession. The author thanks Dr. Tóth for allowing access to this document. *Source:* On the basis of data from “Jelentés az Állami Erdő- és Vadgazdaságok 1971. évi működéséről” [Report on the Operation of State Farms of Forestry and Wildlife Management] by Dr. Sándor Tóth, Head of the Main Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries, Budapest, January 31, 1972. Document in Dr. Sándor Tóth’s possession. The author thanks Dr. Tóth for allowing access to this document.

nearest village or to the cabin serving the nomenklatura hunters) was an obvious (although seldom fully successful) way of attempting to relieve the tension (see figures 4.6 and 4.7).

Among all the guests of Egyetértés, the sons of eight club members (hunters themselves) can be identified. Besides the sons of politburo members already listed in the above table, they are as follows: György Szénási, son of Attorney General Géza Szénási; Imre Cseterki, son of Lajos Cseterki, the secretary of the Presidential Council of the People’s Republic; and Gábor Vallus, son of Pál Vallus, first vice president of the National Price Authority and president of MAVOSZ. Hungary’s first lady, Mrs. Kádár, often went hunting too, and there are sporadic signs that even Mrs. Aczél and Mrs. Fehér took to a rifle every now and then.²³

Even though we lack the necessary data to compare the time and attention devoted to hunting with the time used for other leisure activities (reading, going to concerts, tourism not related to hunting, playing tennis, etc.), there can be no doubt about the relatively high importance of hunting. On the average, the highest ranking members of the Egyetértés Club (the members of the politburo) went hunting on 43 days of the year, which was more than the official number of their paid vacation days.²⁴ Admittedly, the average from 1971 conceals great variations from year to year as well as the variations from member to member—it includes Prime Minister Fock’s 90 days as well as Deputy Prime Minister (later Chairman



Figure 4.6. The Big Boar. The author's father with his three sons. *Source:* The photo was shot in Valkó (Gödöllő reserve), probably in 1957. *Source:* Author's private collection.

of Parliament) Antal Apró's 14 days. I still suspect that the average is not misleading, since these days reflect only visits paid to the various reserves of Egyetértés—some members of Egyetértés were also members of other clubs, and all members of the club certainly received (and accepted) a considerable number of invitations to various corners of the country throughout the year.²⁵ Therefore, in most of the cases, the data we have from Egyetértés should be regarded as a very modest minimum estimate of the total days devoted to hunting.

Another indication of the importance of hunting for the party-state apparatus elite is the considerable amount of time and attention they devoted to policies of forestry and game management, and especially to the affairs of Egyetértés and the management of its five reserves. Kádár's interest in hunting turned him into the most important single patron of such personalities as Count Zsigmond Széchenyi, a passionate hunter and writer of travelogues and hunting stories already in the interwar years, whose "expeditions" to Africa and India received crucial support from Kádár.²⁶ Kádár, together with György Aczél (the country's top politician reigning over cultural and academic life), promoted the publication of popularizing literature and nature (and hunting) films,²⁷ and their acceptance and consent was decisive in the

(re-)publication of such ancient regime classics on nature, wildlife, and hunting as Otto Herman, Kálmán Kittenberger, Herbert Nadler, or Zsigmond Széchenyi.²⁸

The importance attached to hunting is also well reflected in top politicians' (members of the Egyetértés Club) deep involvement in issues pertinent to the management of the club's estates. These state-owned (national) farms of forestry and game management were administered by the Department (later Main Department) of Game Management of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries. The department had national responsibilities, but it was also directly responsible for controlling and coordinating hunting activities and game management on the reserves kept exclusively for Egyetértés. The head of this department was the chief protocol hunter, overseeing the organization and coordination of individual hunting visits to the estates, the reception, and hunting of high foreign dignitaries (Leonid I. Brezhnev, for example, was a relatively frequent visitor on the reserves of Egyetértés), and especially the collective hunting events such as battues for boar and small game. Both department heads in the 1960s and 1970s (István Dénes and Sándor Tóth) had to leave their position because some powerful personalities among the club members (especially politburo members Béla Biszku and Károly Németh) were displeased with their activities. Dénes, responsible for protocol hunting since 1949, was fired because he wished to improve the economy of Egyetértés estates by allowing, at high prices, rich Western hunters into the reserves, and this had allegedly led to the corruption of the professional hunters and other employees at the estates who seemed no longer to pay enough attention to the needs of the "ordinary club members."²⁹ Dénes's place was taken over by Dr. Sándor Tóth, who was also a professional of forestry and game management. His rational ways of husbanding with the resources of the Egyetértés estates, his straightforward manners in which he reported about the situation obtaining and about the use of public resources by the club members often made the top functionaries see red, until they, indeed, got rid of him too by promoting him into a higher position within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries where he no longer had business to do with Egyetértés.³⁰ The 1971 report by the Department of Game Management (signed by Sándor Tóth) made it clear that department decisions and policies had often been crossed by interventions on the part of members of Egyetértés who were all too receptive to what they were being told by various local employees at the reserves:

The Comrades hunting at the various reserves are often disturbed by complaints and [policy] suggestions that interfere with the implementation of our unified objectives. . . . There are all too often interventions with matters of management. Some of the local game managers act as if they no longer

owed obedience to the ministerial authorities [the department of game management].³¹

The Formal and Informal Organization of Hunting: The Curious Ways of Becoming a Club Member

Hunting in socialist Hungary was organized in clubs (*vadásztársaságok*—legally speaking, hunting associations) which were operating on territories owned by agricultural cooperatives or state farms of agriculture and/or forestry and game management. These clubs carried full economic responsibility attached to game management in their territories: they had to keep and fund personnel as well as the material costs of taking care of the day-to-day operation of game management; they had to pay to the forestry and/or agricultural firms for the damages caused by wildlife in the forests and in agricultural areas. On the other hand, they also generated income by selling live and/or shot game to the monopolist trading firm, MAVAD. Indeed, most of the meat produced and the live game captured by the clubs had to be delivered to MAVAD and were then exported to hard currency countries. To keep a club financially in balance required serious efforts on the part of its members: they had to shoot (or/and capture) enough game in order both to earn incomes and to keep costs (especially payments for damages) at a low level (by restricting the size of game populations).

Several impediments had to be overcome if a person wanted to start hunting:

- (a) A license for possessing hunting weapons had to be obtained from the police. The fate of such an application could not be taken for granted as it was often decided upon after a meticulous scrutiny on the part of the police authority in Mátyás Rákosi's or János Kádár's (post-1956) Hungary. For shotguns (used for small games), it was easier to get a license. But a license for a rifle was a declaration on the authorities' part that the owner was a trusted citizen of good social standing in socialist society. Around 1965, no more than 3,000 persons had licenses to hold and use rifles in hunting.³² Even in the 1980s, only 10,000 of altogether 30,000 registered hunters had rifles and the official policy was that the number of rifle-owners should not be increased. It wasn't without reason that hunters talked about "first class citizens with license to have rifle, and second class citizen with license to have only shotgun."³³ Sándor Tóth confirmed too that "Those in the possession of rifles had reasons to regard themselves to be high up socially; they were inside the circle."³⁴ A revealing document in this respect is the letter of István

Dénes, head of the Department of Hunting and Game Management of the National Directorate of Forestry, to Police Captain Szabó of the Gödöllő Police District, from 1959. The Police Department was inclined to reject the application of Antal Fuchs Jr. for license both for shotgun and for a hunting rifle. The motivation was Fuchs's bad ("class-alien") social background: he came from a dynasty of professional hunters of the old regime—his father Antal Fuchs Sr. served on Count Tamás Eszterházy's estate as Chief Hunter. Dénes emphasized that nothing incriminating could be found in Fuchs's records and that the young Fuchs was among the professionals of game management who enjoyed a high reputation. Antal Fuchs Jr. worked at the Gödöllő Reserve, which was one of the "protocol areas" even before 1964, when Egyetértés was formally established.³⁵ Also, rifles (and rifle ammunition) were, of course, much more expensive than shotguns.

- (b) A hunting license was necessary too and could be acquired only by going through an examination in "the theory and ethics of hunting."
- (c) Finally, but not less importantly, one had to be a member of a hunting club.

The third requirement was the hardest to fulfill. After some growth from the late 1950s on—more in the number of clubs than in the number of club members—club membership had become by the end of the 1960s almost inaccessible. For young candidates, getting a membership proved to be harder than getting enrolled as a university student (which was hard), as the president of MAVOSZ admitted in 1974. But the way in which the contemporary journalist understood this problem reveals what appears to have been a *social-hierarchical* impediment in the *commoners'* way of getting admitted to hunting clubs: "It is pretty hard nowadays to become a member of a hunting club [if one is] applying 'from the street.'" ³⁶ Needless to say, it was not functionaries of the party-state that were applying "from the street." Established hunting clubs were hesitant to admit new members defending the interests (privileges) of their existing members. As another journalist noted, "One can but agree with the critical opinion that describes the hunting clubs as closed associations of the privileged—a person who wishes to become member of a club has to wait very long before he would (if at all) get admitted."³⁷

It was not easy either to get membership through the establishment of new clubs. Legally, hunting clubs were regarded as associations and as such their establishment was contingent not only upon the benevolence of the Ministry of Agriculture but also upon the permission of the Ministry of the Interior. The Department of Hunting and Game Management had to process (and most often reject) a steady stream of applications from

groups who wished to establish hunting clubs and asked for the assignment of various hunting grounds.³⁸

Membership, either by admittance to existing clubs or via establishing new clubs, was therefore in very short supply and, as in the case of other shortage goods, access to it tended to be distributed through transactions among and by the privileged and powerful. Word from the right kind of patron could make wonders happen—like in the case of Ferenc Varga, chairman of the successful agricultural cooperative “Óbuda,” whose aspirations to become the member of a hunting club were rejected by the club. He then turned to János Kádár and asked for help. Appreciating Varga’s merits as a successful cooperative leader,³⁹ Kádár intervened on his behalf and asked the president of MAVOSZ, Pál Vallus (himself member of Egyetértés) to persuade the hunting club in question to admit Varga. In 10 days, Varga became a club member.⁴⁰

The establishment of new hunting clubs was also dependent upon access to the proper networks. People in leading positions in my father’s office (including my father) were all well taken care of, but other higher ranking employees of KNEB (department chiefs and others) got also “contaminated” by the passion for hunting and mobilized their patrons to arrange for an own hunting club. They applied to the Ministry of Agriculture asking for the assignment of a (high value) territory appropriate for big-game hunting. The application carried a list of nine suggested club members, only three of whom had not yet been members of any hunting club. Most surprising to me among the latter three was to find my mother’s name—this was obviously a tactical move as both “new membership” and the presence of women improved the chances of a positive response.⁴¹

My father lent his support to the application by contacting directly the vice minister reigning over forestry and game management, László Földes (a member of Egyetértés).⁴² The bid on behalf of KNEB was joined and supported by four top-level leaders of the Communist Party Committee of Fejér County.⁴³ This proved to be a powerful enough combination and the ministry’s Department of Hunting and Game Management did its best to oblige—the Székesfehérvár Nimród Hunting Club was operative from 1967 on. While his social standing was too low for a membership in Egyetértés, my father’s status for Nimród proved soon too high. He left the club offended when other club members (some of them his subordinates at KNEB) had objections to securing him and my mother a separate room in the club’s overcrowded cottage over the weekends in the season.⁴⁴

Another case of success was when members of the Egyetértés Club managed to arrange for the establishment of two new hunting clubs. One was to accommodate former Egyetértés members who went into pension or left for other reasons their high positions and another to provide members’ sons with proper hunting grounds. Carving out a part of



Figure 4.7. Stalking in a Big Game Area (Börzsöny Mountains in Northeastern Hungary). From the right: Friend/colleague of author's father, author's father and mother (late 1950s)." *Source:* Author's private collection.

the Telki Reserve (at Koldusszállás, close to the small provincial city of Tatabánya) in 1974, they established a separate club, "Barátság" (Friendship), for those members who had for various reasons lost their positions originally making them eligible for membership in Egyetértés.⁴⁵ In a similar gesture, already in 1971, Egyetértés "donated" a part of its territories (close to the city of Hatvan) on the basis of which adult sons of the club's members got the unique privilege and chance to establish their own club, the Young Nimrod Club (Nimród Ifjúsági Vadásztársaság). Members of this new club included György Biszku, Imre Cseterki Jr., Lajos Fehér Jr. (but also one of Lajos Fehér's daughters and son-in-law), Jenő Fock Jr., Károly Németh Jr., Ferenc Szűcs Jr., Gábor Vallus, the son of Pál Vallus (vice president of the Price Authority, and president of MAVOSZ), the son of Mihály Koller (general secretary of MAVOSZ), and others.⁴⁶ János Kádár received an invitation from the "Young Nimróds" to join them in partridge shooting in Hatvan. In his letter, club president Imre Cseterki, the son of Lajos Cseterki, emphasized "We, young hunters have been with great love and devotion preparing for this occasion. Considering especially all the efforts exerted by Comrade Kádár in order to assist the establishment of our hunting club, we would be most appreciative if you could accept our invitation."⁴⁷ As has been mentioned, the "Young Nimrods" could launch their club only thanks to the fact that Egyetértés accepted the transfer to them of one of their finest small-game areas in

the Hatvan region (originally belonging to the Gödöllő estate). In the name of “socialist legality,” the transfer went through the Council of Pest County—Pest County took over the territory from the Gödöllő National Farm of Forestry and Game Management into their possession; but they had been given to understand that Comrade Kádár and other comrades wished this piece of land to be let out for the Nimrod Youth Hunting Club. The loss suffered by Egyetértés was immediately “compensated” through qualifying the Soponya estate as a national farm of game management, thus establishing exclusive access to the area for the Egyetértés Club. Soponya is about a hundred kilometers southwest of Budapest, arguably the most superb small-game land in the country where, at the age of 14, I shot my first and only games, a hare and a pheasant.

Finally, a similar solution was offered to interested wives of Egyetértés members. The idea was enthusiastically promoted by Mrs. Lajos Fehér, and she was joined by Mrs. Kádár too. Béla Csatári, first secretary of the party’s Békés County organization, undertook to “organize” a proper piece of land for them, but the project never reached implementation as the number of wives wishing to become club members failed to reach the necessary minimum.⁴⁸

All in all, the apparatus class asserted their interests in the scramble for hunting grounds quite effectively through a whole series of hunting clubs possessed and controlled by them by the late 1960s. The high-up generals of the Ministry of Defense launched their own club, the “Máté Zalka” Hunting Club, upon the model of Egyetértés; the high officials of the council of the capital city Budapest had their hunting club and so did the Ministry of Interior (indeed, they had several clubs), the Attorney General’s Office, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Agriculture (and, within it, the Central Authority of State Farms), the National Council of Trade Unions (SZOT), as well as the National Union of Food Industrial Workers (MEDOSZ), and there were a number of provincial clubs established and run by provincial council- and party-leaders.⁴⁹

In its control over the distribution of hunting opportunities, of club memberships, and hunting grounds, the party-state apparatus class could to an increasing extent rely upon the National Association of Hungarian Hunters, MAVOSZ. Reading lists of the national and county-level leaders of MAVOSZ in the 1960s and 1970s is like reading lists of the nomenklatura of state-socialist Hungary. Egyetértés was heavily represented among MAVOSZ’s national board members and leading functionaries, in the same way as, at the county level, MAVOSZ local organizations would include MSZMP county secretaries, presidents or vice-presidents of the county council, and other dignitaries of the county’s political and economic life. Regulations introduced in 1970 took away the professional supervision and control of game management and hunting from

the administrations of county councils, and these responsibilities (and mandates) were transferred to the county organizations of MAVOSZ. The county organizations operated from 1968 with salaried secretaries (as a rule, a person appointed by and loyal to the local nomenklatura elite), and they had the right to "delegate" 25% of club members to newly established or dissolved and re-established hunting clubs. As for the working of the new order, we know of cases where middle-level functionaries (county leaders, department chiefs, and deputy chiefs of ministries, etc.) tried with takeovers. Through the MAVOSZ and other authorities, they tried to forcefully dissolve certain hunting clubs which they wished to take into their possession. We can safely take it for granted that, where the existing hunting clubs could not mobilize patrons powerful enough to counteract the bid, these actions could be successful. In a similar vein, MAVOSZ county organizations had the power to order old club members to undergo the examination for hunters introduced in 1964. Those who failed lost their rights and their club membership which, again, made place for MAVOSZ to nominate "good comrades to strengthen the club."⁵⁰ The county organization of MAVOSZ (the provincial functionaries of the party-state) acquired full control over hunting also when it came to invitations to gratis hunting (*térítésmentes meghívásos vadászat*) on the county's hunting areas. As Sándor Tóth explained it to me,

this enabled the leaders of the county to utilize the gratis invitations towards building up their own networks and pleasing top functionaries of the country. This [system] brought with it, in practical terms, that good stags or bucks, or whatever games of interest that were on offer by the county's hunting clubs for guests, were utilized by county leaders in their own name and they could thus act (and oblige) as generous hosts of top-ranking comrades [from Budapest].⁵¹

Multiple Club Memberships and Networks of Reciprocity

If, for example, Antal Apró had been invited to hunt by a chairman of a county council or a county party secretary and if Apró was nicely treated and had a nice hunting experience, well, then that person from that county was invited to Egyetértés.⁵²

Until 1964 (when Egyetértés was established and a thorough legislation regulating hunting in the country was introduced), hunting in the apparatus class took place to a great extent in a haphazard manner, at the will of central and local party-state bosses. Increasing interest in nomenklatura circles for hunting from the late 1950s is clearly indicated in the archival documents. One manifestation of this was the higher frequency of serious

accidents caused by “functionaries of various political and social organizations” who forced employees of various units of the national forestry and game management to allow them to hunt, even to lend them their weapons, although these functionaries had neither the necessary competence nor hunting license or license to use the weapons.⁵³

With the necessary legislation and other normative directives in place, and with the needs of top functionaries well taken care of by Protocol Hunting on the best reserves, central authorities launched a campaign to discipline lower (especially provincial) levels of the *nomenklatura* and confine their hunting to the legally prescribed frameworks. Significantly, one of the objectives of the campaign must have been to keep these lower strata of the apparatus class of the party-state away from the hunting grounds of *Egyetértés*—from the NFGM. Vice Prime Minister and politburo member Lajos Fehér’s “Strictly Secret!” circular to all presidents of county councils and municipal councils at the county level (including the council of the capital city, Budapest) is revealing in this respect:

We have been informed that in several counties, council employees, mostly in leading positions, disregard the prevailing law and other binding norms of game management and hunting. In several cases they used their power to extort hunting opportunities from forestry farms and hunting clubs, even when on the territory in question the permitted contingent of shooting game had been fully exhausted and/or, within the frameworks of such a contingent, the hunting opportunities for small game and for trophy game had already been reserved. . . . [These uninvited guests], Violating the law and the norms [of decent behavior] often fail to pay for catering and for other costs [which then have to be paid for of budgets of representation of the units upon which the visits were imposed]. . . . This illegal hunting and the representation [catering] costs attendant to it are intolerable, they are not compatible with our employees’ official duties, and they grossly violate socialist ethical norms [*a szocialista erkölcsöt*]. *The primary objective of the game management of national farms and national farms of forestry is to capture live game for export and breeding purposes and to generate hard currency incomes by hunting organized for foreigners. . . . Therefore, this illegal hunting is not only immoral, but it also causes serious economic losses.*⁵⁴

Of course, besides export, breeding, and hunting by foreigners, game management on national farms also served the members and guests of the *Egyetértés* Club. But the problem addressed in Fehér’s letter shows clearly the great interest in hunting exhibited by provincial party-state functionaries as well as the resolution of the higher echelons of political elite to preserve their monopoly rights over the best hunting grounds run by the NFGM.⁵⁵

Under the legal frameworks, then, the only way of increasing the amount and variety of hunting opportunities at one’s disposal was via (a)

acquiring membership in several clubs or/and (b) establishing and developing informal networks among members of the various hunting clubs, extending invitations to one another on the basis of reciprocity. Multiple memberships were formally not accepted but tolerated. Sándor Tóth could identify 14 such cases of multiple memberships among the members of Egyetértés.⁵⁶ Extending and receiving invitations had probably a greater contribution toward increasing hunting opportunities than multiple club memberships. An indication of the dimensions of such transactions is that the National Committee of Hunting Ethics of MAVOSZ felt it appropriate to spell out in detail the “Ethical Norms of Inviting Guest Hunters and Accepting Such Invitations” in 1974. The committee started their recommendations by encouraging this kind of hospitality among different hunting clubs, and they emphasized particularly the wisdom in exercising this “noble tradition” by inviting leading functionaries:

Leaders of party and social organizations and state authorities are most welcome guests in hunting. Inviting them makes it possible for them to acquaint themselves with the inner life of our hunting clubs and their economic management: they can form an opinion of the work executed by our hunters and their useful advice can be fruitfully utilized in our further work.⁵⁷

In other words, the National Committee of Hunting Ethics of MAVOSZ, an organization dominated by top echelons of the nomenklatura, solicited invitations by the hunting clubs for county- and national-level leaders of the party-state as their guest hunters. It cannot be far from the truth to guess that the number and quality of invitations a hunter received increased and improved exponentially as a function of his social-hierarchical position. Also, between significantly different levels of the social-political hierarchy, the reciprocity of these transactions was probably limping, to the benefit of those in higher positions—that is, those of higher standing could accept more invitations at the expense of issuing fewer than those whose hierarchical position was lower.

True reciprocity tended to prevail among equals. When the “Gründerzeit” for hunting clubs of “lower-than-top” functionaries was over, invitations remained the main way of increasing the quantity and variation of hunting opportunities. The “1st May” Hunting Club in the Börzsöny Mountains, where my father was a member, had no small-game areas at all. My father’s frequent excursions to small-game landscapes were made possible by the many invitations he received. I found photos among the documents he left with me after he passed away that were shot on small game hunts he had been treated to, among others, by the “Zalka Máté” Hunting Club of the Ministry of Defense.

This club had probably the next-to-best situation, after Egyetértés, when it came to their possession of large and excellent hunting grounds:



Figure 4.8. The Chief of Military Intelligence, the Minister of Defense, and the Author's Father Having a Break at a Small Game Battue, Early 1960s. *Source:* Author's private collection.

thanks to the proliferation of military (missile) bases in the 1960s in northern as well as southwestern Hungary. Civilians were banned from a considerable number of superb areas of big and small game over which the generals (top officials of the Ministry of Defense) successfully asserted exclusive hunting rights. Luckily for my father, during his time as a deputy department chief in the Central Committee apparatus, he established close, friendly relationships with a number of important members of the Zalka club: Ferenc Kaszás, Dezső Trombitás, Tibor Tarcsay (all generals, vice ministers, and/or group chiefs in the Ministry after 1963–1964), all used to be his colleagues in the Central Committee apparatus previously; he also had working (and hunting) relations with General Ferenc Szűcs (the head of military counter-intelligence, a great enthusiast of hunting, and a central personality of Egyetértés), and the Minister of Defense himself, Lajos Czinege (see figures 4.3 and 4.8).⁵⁸

THE POLITICAL AND MORAL ECONOMY OF HUNTING: MEAT, HIERARCHIES, AND SOCIAL DISTINCTION

Resources Appropriated

We have already seen that the annual game bag of elite clubs, such as Egyetértés or the Máté Zalka Club, was several times larger than that of

the “average hunter’s” in Hungary. For this, no club member had to pay more than a nominal annual membership fee and sometimes the cost price for the catering. Let’s look at the summary table of the game bag of Egyetértés for 1971 (see table 4.2):

Considering the impressive size of the annual bag and the relatively large number of high value trophies in it, the game bag itself represented an enormous economic value. Using the same prices to the game bag as the ones paid by foreign (Western) hunters—the only ones who had to pay anything like a market price for both the shooting and the services and infrastructure they used—we would come to shocking amounts. Relying on such prices applying in 1964, only the shooting fee for the eight gold medal red deer stags would have cost half a million Forints for the club members (the actual 1971 prices were probably much higher).⁵⁹ Once again, what Egyetértés members shot on the domains of their own club is often significantly less than their actual individual game bag in any year, due to the considerable amount of hunting they could do on invitations.

The second item that should be considered among the resources appropriated is the wide scale of services and immense infrastructure that the hunter as consumer utilized: (a) One of the major advantages of the nomenklatura hunter in the competition for hunting opportunities is his state-owned but privately possessed car. Club members, like Prime Minister Jenő Fock, who visited the reserves of Egyetértés 90 or even over 100 times a year, could do so because they had at their unlimited disposal a car with a chauffeur who worked as their personal servant. The number of cars owned by private individuals in Hungary remained very low well into the 1970s, which makes the privileges of the apparatus class in this respect even more conspicuous.⁶⁰ Even the NFGM, serving

Table 4.2. The 1971 Game Bag of the Egyetértés Hunting Club

Red Deer	Total	668
Red Deer	Stags	253
Fallow Deer	Total	77
Fallow Deer	Bucks	38
Roe Deer	Total	171
Roe Deer	Bucks	126
Mouflon	Total	11
Mouflon	Rams	11
Boar	Total	839
Small Game	Total	14,789

Source: On the basis of data from “Jelentés az Állami Erdő- és Vadgazdaságok 1971. évi működéséről” [Report on the Operation of State Farms of Forestry and Wildlife Management] by Dr. Sándor Tóth, Head of the Main Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries, Budapest, January 31, 1972. Document in Dr. Sándor Tóth’s possession. The author thanks Dr. Tóth for allowing access to this document.

the club, used a considerable amount of their resources to acquire and maintain special, four-wheel-drive cars and horse-drawn carriages to be used in connection with hunting. (b) In general, the National Farms provided and took care of an infrastructure that served the noble hunters when they visited their reserves: there were a number of houses (often fine old-time manor houses) that served their comfort; a personnel to cook for them⁶¹ and clean the houses; the professional hunters who were responsible locally for game management but who also acted as guides, advisers, and assistants for the club members when they visited the various reserves; on the occasions of battues, a whole army of beaters were recruited from the nearby villages for around 50 Forints and/or a hare a day for each. (c) Members of Egyetértés received their ammunition gratis from the Department of Hunting and Game Management of the Ministry of Agriculture. Good quality ammunition was manufactured specially for the protocol hunters of Egyetértés by the Hungarian *Nitrokémia* Works at Fűzfő (otherwise, the ammunition, especially ammunition for shotguns, accessible for commoners had a rather bad reputation).⁶² (d) Egyetértés had a unique situation (unlike other hunting clubs belonging to the apparatus class) in that the club lived in a symbiotic relationship with the NFGM. The National Farms operated as a fiscal organization financing their expenses (investments as well as current costs) out of grants in the state budget and paying all their incomes into the same budget. It is little wonder that the National Farms prospered —their operation benefited the same top politicians who in effect decided upon the amount of public resources that were allotted to them every year. In 1963, the budget of the National Farms was HUF 10 million, by the late 1960s, it had grown to around HUF 60–70 million, and by around 1985, it had increased to 350 million channeled partly in investments into new luxury hunting houses built for the convenience of nomenklatura hunters.⁶³

Besides the unique outing and hunting opportunities, the infrastructure, the supplies of various services and ammunition to which the nomenklatura hunter had practically gratis access, we should also mention an almost vulgarly materialistic aspect: there was a great deal of meat to be brought home from hunting. There was a norm (called *kompetencia*) according to which each hunter in Hungary could free of charge take home 60 kilograms of big game (1 kilogram of big game could be replaced with one pheasant or a hare), every year. From each battue, Egyetértés members could take three pieces of small game or 2 kilograms of big game (battues were also organized in boar hunting). On individual hunts, one could retain meat out of the game bag at the price the MAVAD would have given for it to the NFGM. This price was about half of the retail prices of comparable first-class pork or beef.⁶⁴ In other words, nomenklatura hunting yielded high-quality meat at low and/or no costs. In my family's

otherwise modest meat consumption from the late 1950s on, game figured high. I also remember that my father and his friends themselves produced sausages and salami of boar and deer for family consumption, which was extremely popular in our circles. Large demand of this sort is in evidence in the history of the Egyetértés Club too: the club used the services of the Szeged Salami Factory (where the well-known Pick Salami is produced) to process game and deliver, on the individual club members' orders, a variety of sausages and salamis at very lenient prices.⁶⁵

Hierarchies and Social Distinction

No doubt, hunting had been by tradition a gentlemen's sport in Hungary and, especially when it came to big game (red deer, fallow deer, roe deer, bear [for pre-1918 Hungary], and boar), it can even be said to have been a sport for the high nobility or aristocracy. The simple reason for this is that, from the early medieval era, hunting rights went hand in hand and were spatially co-extensive with the ownership of lands, and the best and richest hunting grounds constituted parts of the large estates mostly in the hands of aristocratic families until as late as 1945.⁶⁶ Hunting became a marker of social distinction which even affected the value and meaning of small-game hunting (i.e., hunting for hare, pheasant, partridge, bustard, waterfowl) where the accessibility of hunting areas was slightly more "democratic" than in the case of big game. The late nineteenth century and the interwar years saw the spread of recreational hunting among urban middle-class and even lower middle-class circles,⁶⁷ thanks to the possibilities of hiring communal areas in the "green belts" surrounding major cities (these areas were rented out in competitive auctions, and complaints over steeply rising prices during the interwar period indicate the growing popularity of hunting among social groups other than the traditional landed elites).⁶⁸ Nonetheless, the prevalent image of (big game) hunting even after 1945 was that it was the exclusive pastime of the aristocracy.

Against this "stigmatizing" background, it is understandable that the press of the communist era (as well as the propaganda of MAVOSZ) claimed repeatedly that the new socialist social order "democratized" hunting, making it accessible to those who, in the ancient regime, could only get close to hunting as beaters.⁶⁹ Side by side with the narrative of "democratized hunting," another discursive avenue to cement the social reputation of hunting (and the distinguished hunters) was the claim that hunting was a socio-economically useful and ecologically vitally important activity the heroes of which, who exerted physical efforts for no remuneration using their free time, were the hunters themselves. Thanks to the regulations of the early 1960s reinforcing rational (scientific) wildlife

management, hunters from the apparatus class could pose as workers whose contribution was essential to maintaining and running a branch of the socialist economy that yielded substantial hard currency revenues through exports of meat and live game as well as through the hunting tourism from the West to Hungary. Also, hunters (among them the functionaries) under state socialism partook in the transnational discourse that construed hunting as a crucial replacement for missing predators. Thus, it is argued, hunting is not only essential for maintaining the ecological balance within wildlife, but it also makes a significant contribution toward securing high quality of the game stocks by regularly "culling the herd," that is, selectively shooting low-quality individuals. To show that they shared the order applying in other hunting societies, *Egyetértés* every now and then made gestures to assert a strict regime of rationing in order to restrict the shooting of red deer and fallow bucks with high class trophies, to leave these for rich Western visitors, and to concentrate on "sub-standard individuals" which, it was said, had to be prevented from playing a role in reproduction.⁷⁰

By the mid-1960s, hunting by the party-state apparatus class had by and large been squeezed into the confines of "socialist legality," and functionaries of various descriptions were hunting with licensed weapons, based on hunting licenses and as members of hunting clubs. Despite regularly repeated assurances about the "democratic nature" of hunting under socialism, even the publicly accessible general social statistics of the "hunters' community" could reveal a strong bias in the distribution of hunting opportunities to the benefit of the general category of "professionals, intellectuals" or "white collar employees" (statistical categories in which the apparatus class was tucked away). In 1970, slightly more than 25% of all active earners belonged to the group of "managers and intellectuals" and "mid-level employees" (clerks, professionals).⁷¹ Newspaper reports from press conferences granted by the officials of MAVOSZ were regularly placing the share of "physical workers" in hunters' society around 50%.⁷² In other words, the group of managers, professionals, and white collar workers (and, if it had been possible to separate from among them, the apparatus class and political elite) were strongly over-represented in the membership of hunting clubs.

This skewed distribution of hunting opportunities was reinforced to the extreme by the already mentioned restrictions applying to the procurement and holding of weapons. Even as late as in the 1980s, less than a third of socialist Hungary's hunters had the right to dispose of and use rifles—the rest had to contend themselves with shotguns. Obviously, hunting with a rifle implied a world both quantitatively and qualitatively different from the world of hunting with a shotgun. The rifle went hand in hand with big game hunting in large spaces of mountain areas covered

by forests; shotgun, on the other hand, meant small game hunting in rather restricted, flat, and agriculturally cultivated landscapes.⁷³

The strong stratification of hunters' society was further enhanced by the highly unequal situation of different clubs in terms of the quality of their territories and the resources at their disposal. Elite clubs, like Egyetértés or the "Máté Zalka" Hunting Club, appropriated a great deal of public resources. To begin with, the hunting grounds under their control were large and had the richest and highest quality game populations in the country. Of the two named, however, Egyetértés was obviously the superior one. Trophy statistics make this quite obvious: In a period of five years (1970–1975), Egyetértés members shot 71 stags of red deer and 60 bucks of fallow with gold medal antlers. The Máté Zalka Hunting Club, although it disposed of much more extensive domains than Egyetértés, could "only" boast of 60 gold medal antlers of red deer stags and seven pairs of gold medal antlers of fallow bucks, all shot over 15 years.⁷⁴ The majority of the fallow population in the country had its habitat on two reserves (Gyulaj and Telki), both belonging to Egyetértés.

Just as much as hunting remained to be an elite leisure, so did hierarchies prevail even within the top hunting clubs. In the generally privileged Egyetértés, special privileges were enjoyed by the most powerful politburo members. János Kádár, Jenő Fock, Béla Biszku, and Lajos Fehér had their own favorite territories, hunting houses, and even favorite professional hunters over whose services they asserted priority claims. The Pilis area and its professional leader, Oszkár Dvorák, with the house at Hamvaskő, "belonged to" Lajos Fehér, in the sense that if he wished to go out hunting there, then it was his house. The old hunting castle of Metternich at Gyarmatpuszta "belonged" to Béla Biszku and Jenő Fock. Between Christmas and three days after New Year's Eve, no one could challenge János Kádár's priority when it came to two areas of the Gemenc reserve: Veránka and Upper Gemenc, taken care of by the professional hunters János Berek and István Parti.⁷⁵

The club was rather restrictive with invitations, and I agree with Sándor Tóth that this was so probably because "they did not wish to show outsiders how they were living and hunting as they would not have liked to hear or read critical comments about their privileged situation." Perhaps, they wanted also to avoid contact with lower level functionaries of the party-state in an informal context, not wishing to "work" as well as trying to spare themselves from the tedious attempts at patron-seeking from below. The few invitations that were issued, however, were carefully targeting people who deserved an invitation by their good services to Egyetértés and/or people who were on their way to top levels within the nomenklatura: "If a political leader from a county was invited to hunt, that was most often because the person in question was going to be promoted

to a national top position (Kádár knew, of course, that they were going to appoint him).” That such an event was of great significance in the everyday life of the apparatus class is clearly shown also, in that secretaries of MSZMP county organizations went out of their way to prevent their lower ranking employees from participating in Egyetértés hunts.⁷⁶

Members of Egyetértés signalized their status also by retaining the services of several professional hunters from the ancient regime. Endre Nagy, Ákos Szederjei, Oszkár Barát, István Parti, Kornél Böröcki, Géza Gosztonyi, Antal Fuchs, Ferenc Stoflitz, Oszkár Dvorák, János Berek, etc. were professional hunters (and many of them were also sons of professional hunters) who distinguished themselves in the service of pre-1945 large estates owned by aristocratic families or the clergy. Many of these people had excellent rapport with János Kádár, György Aczél, and other leading members of Egyetértés.⁷⁷

That hunting brought with it social status and distinction or, putting it in another way, that access to hunting required social status, was rather clear to the rank-and-file too. They hardly bought the propaganda maintaining that in hunting “social differences ceased to exist—all club members are but hunters.”⁷⁸ Indeed, we know of a case when they tried to cheat the social order of hunting and establish a hunting club by faking the inclusion of high nomenklatura personalities among their members.⁷⁹ The reaction to this attempt by the controlling authority is most revealing:

I find it extremely remarkable that the hunting club in question was established under the circumstances described and I think MAVOSZ should not accept this. I find it quite impossible to believe that on 19th July, comrades István Dobi and Ernő Mihályfi were present at the meeting in Vértesszöllős. The whole protocol is a flagrant abuse of their names. Comrade [Vice Minister Gyula] Balassa will contact Comrade Dobi in this matter. . . . It would not at all surprise me if the minutes proved to be a vulgar fake. *It cannot be regarded as normal that Comrade István Dobi, who has at his disposal any of the national reserves (which is only natural), would wish to “enter” the Súlyom Club of Vértesszöllős, where lorry driver József Horváth is the chairman, and he would serve as “political officer”, while the “master hunter” would be Comrade Ernő Mihályfi, one of the leaders of the Patriotic People’s Front. Remarkable names, oddly misplaced [Elgondolkoztató nevek, különös beosztásban].* I cannot see it as probable that Comrades Dobi and Mihályfi are aware of these for them not too honorable appointments and the minutes. Or will it be the same István Csató, identified in the minutes as controller, who will control Comrade István Dobi?⁸⁰

Department chief Dénes’s horror over imagining Comrade Dobi as member of the Súlyom Club where the chairman was a simple lorry driver epitomizes a social world that was not only discriminating and exclusive against the lower classes but also firmly placed hunting among

the terrains of sociability (and forms of luxury consumption) demarcated for the leisure of the ruling apparatus class.

What Was, Then, In It, for Them?

My father was born and grew up in the interwar era. In his teenage years (the late 1930s and the war years), he started working in the Budapest textile industries and joined the social-democratic youth organization and later the underground communist party. By then, it had been a tradition among the Budapest socialist working-class youth to arrange much of their political and social life around hiking excursions to the hills and mountains to the Northwest and Northeast of the capital city. This kind of outing was practically the only accessible way for them to enjoy nature, to breathe fresh air, and relax. Outing was also regarded as a useful conspiratorial practice in their efforts to escape the gaze of the political police (although its efficiency was seriously undermined by the presence of numerous informers among their ranks). This legacy of the past in the workers' movement had certainly played some role in the upsurge of interest in hunting, especially after 1956. But hunting was more importantly one of the scarce opportunities for many of them to deploy the status and power they wielded in gaining *private* pleasure. In fact, opportunities for making one's high social status yield an "income" in terms of improved personal well-being were relatively restricted under the state-socialist social order.⁸¹ Normally, one could not amass large private fortunes and let them grow (in this respect, the opportunities to turn privileged access to *communal* infrastructure such as top-level rental housing into private fortunes came during the extensive privatization in the transition period after 1989). "Conspicuous consumption" like collection of rare coins, private import of expensive Western furniture, etc., could easily become suspicious and lead to scandals and even tragedies. The salaries even of high functionaries were not lavishly high, as the data in table 4.3 show.

Hunting, however, was a singularly appropriate hobby and leisure to develop and cultivate a "passion" about. With their exclusive hunting grounds in mostly uninhabited parts of the countryside, hunting clubs offered a benevolent refuge from the public's eyes. The general public could not know much about the particular circumstances attendant to the hunting of the apparatus class (about the exceptional privileges enjoyed by them in terms of exclusive access to the best areas, of the infrastructure and services extended to them by the state farms of forestry and wildlife management, etc.). The strict regulations of the early half of the 1960s were put in place in order, among other things, to enhance this privacy. Through disciplining and "normalizing" the hunting activities of the country's provincial and Budapest-based functionaries, János Kádár

Table 4.3. Multipliers between Average Industrial Wage (= 1) and the Salaries of the Party-State's Functionaries

First Deputy Minister	4.04	CC Department Chief	3.73
Deputy Minister	3.47	CC Deputy Department Chief	3.14
Chief of Main Department in Government Department	3.14	CC Division Chief	2.70
Department Chief in Government Department	2.55	Political Referent	2.15
Capital City Council Officials' Average	2.29	Capital City Party Organization Officials' Average	1.81

Source: For the average industrial wage *Statistikai Évkönyv 1969* [1969 Yearbook of Statistics] (Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 1970). For the average salaries in the party and state apparatus "Kimutatás a pártapparátus és a hasonló állami szervek dolgozóinak átlagkeresetéről" [Data concerning the average earnings of employees of the party apparatus compared to their counterparts in state authorities], Budapest, attached to "Javaslat a Politikai Bizottságnak a pártapparátus béarányainak rendezésére (Tervezet)" [Proposal to the adjustment of the salaries in the party apparatus (Draft)] October 7, 1968. Pgo 606/1968. MOL 288. f. 37/1968/1. 6e., fol. 61.

managed to oppress the anarchic poaching that had been widespread among them throughout the 1950s and to secure optimal conditions to achieve a happy symbiosis between "socialist legality," rational forestry and wildlife management, and the apparatus class' hunting interests.⁸²

The communist takeover accomplished in Hungary in 1948 was not confined to political power. The socioeconomic transformation commencing during and continuing right after the war⁸³ yielded not only a political economy characterized by a maximal expansion of state ownership over the nation's wealth and productive infrastructure, but it also resulted in a social order in which the party-state's functionaries could and did assert themselves as the new ruling class. They owned the state, and the state owned the country. As the owners of exclusive disposition rights over all the resources belonging to the state, they were the monopolists of the political sphere and, at the same time, the privileged proprietors and beneficiaries of the country's major infrastructures serving private comfort, pleasure, and leisure. Taking all positions of political, economic, administrative decision-making at local, regional, and national levels, concurrently and just as self-evidently they also settled in and took over the villas, houses, summer and winter resorts of the old ruling classes.⁸⁴

Indeed, they took over not only the habitat but also the habits of their predecessors who constituted the main targets of their rhetoric of class hatred, especially in the early years of their power.⁸⁵ The solution to our seeming paradox lies to a great extent in the political economy of the expropriation of the surplus value under state-socialist conditions. The great bulk of this expropriation takes the form of macroeconomic decisions of central planning affecting the division of the annual national income between "consumption" and "accumulation." But part of the surplus value

had to be used as dividends rewarding the party-state apparatus for its role and services in administering and maintaining the system. After all, as Central Committee PGO department chief, Dezső Lakatos so gently put it “We . . . [members of the party apparatus] are not different from the average person in any respect—except, perhaps, in that we have undertaken more in building socialism.” In an economy, however, where both market regulation and the accumulation of *private capital* were severely restricted, the appropriation of this part of the surplus value tended to happen *in kind* rather than in monetary form. Privileged access, at no or merely nominal prices, to health care with up-to-date medical technologies, to the finest recreational facilities (including the best hunting grounds, their personnel and complete infrastructure), to the highest quality segments of communal housing, to a vast fleet of often luxurious cars, to the best secondary and higher education institutions for one’s children, to the most sought-after possibilities/opportunities of travels abroad, etc. —these were all forms of private appropriation of the social surplus. But they also had an instrumental as well as symbolic role in the social reproduction of status and class position. As we have seen, hunting, calculated at market prices, enabled its apparatchik practitioners to appropriate values several times their annual salaries. However, a membership in or regular invitations to Egyetértés or other hunting clubs of the party-state apparatus also confirmed class affiliation and conferred social distinction.

NOTES

1. Cf. György Péteri, “Sites of Convergence: The USSR and Communist Eastern Europe at International Fairs Abroad and at Home,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (January 2012): 3–12.

2. Report of the Minister of Food Industries and Agriculture to the Revolutionary Workers-Peasants’ Government of the Hungarian People’s Republic, on the World Exhibition of Hunting, 1971. Budapest, October 26, 1971. MOL, Budapest, Papers of the Exhibition Bureau of the Ministry of Food Industries & Agriculture, Box 9.

3. Cf. László Földes, et al., *Összefoglaló jelentés. Vadászati Világkiállítás, Budapest, 1971* [Summary Report – The World Hunting Exhibition, Budapest, 1971], unpublished ms printed by the Exhibition Bureau of the Ministry of Agriculture & Food Industries, 1972, 251.

4. Considerations for the negotiations to be conducted with relevant governmental authorities of the countries remaining to be recruited to the “World Hunting Exhibition, Budapest, 1971,” draft, December 4, 1970. László Földes papers, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries, MOL, XIX-K-9-aj, box 39.

5. The Duke of Edinburgh was a passionate hunter, but the main spectacle honored by his presence was the European Carriage Driving Championship (September 16–19, 1971) arranged within the Expo ‘71. The Queen, Elizabeth II’s entry to the

championship made the event of particular interest to all the British visitors, as well as to Lord Inglewood's team of the British pavilion. Cf. Lord Inglewood's handwritten letter to György Kozma, department head of the Exhibition Bureau of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries, August 25, 1970. *Mezőgazdasági Múzeum* [Museum of Agriculture, Budapest – hereafter *MMB*], Papers of the World Exhibition of Hunting (VVK), Box nr. 11.

6. For the program of and high-level protocol surrounding Lord Inglewood's stay in Budapest, including his meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Lajos Fehér – *MMB*, Papers of the World Exhibition of Hunting (VVK), Box nr. 57.

7. Letter by Mrs. Zeleznik Sándorné of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to György Kozma, department head of the Exhibition Bureau of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries, informing of and asking for arrangements to receive the 'delegation' of the *Société de Vénérerie* to the World Exhibition, dated June 7, 1971, nr. 1360-169/1971, *MMB* Papers of the World Exhibition of Hunting (VVK), Box nr. 57.

8. For the documentation concerning the Belgian participation – *MMB* Papers of the World Exhibition of Hunting (VVK), Box nr. 7.

9. Kádár-era Hungary was quite eager right after 1956 to receive visitors from the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, and other Western countries for hunting. Between 1956-1960, approximately 1000 Western hunters visited Hungary. For the period 1960-1975, their number grew to 12000 a year, and in the decade between 1975-1985 it jumped again to an annual average of 15000. The amounts of hard currency they left in Hungary was a more than welcome addition to the export performance of the country's wildlife management in terms of meat and live animal exports. Cf. *Nimród* (The Journal of the Association of Hungarian Hunters), Vol. 105, Nr. 4 (April 1985).

10. *Az 1971. évi Budapesti Vadászati Világkiállítás iratai* (Papers of the 1971 Budapest World Exhibition of Hunting), *MMB* III. 9425. Daily Reports August 27–September 30, 1971.

11. Béla Biszku (1921-2016), Central Committee Secretary (1962-78) and Politbureau member between (1956-80) supervising the party control over the country's armed forces, judiciary, prosecutor's office and police, was one of the leading personalities of the conservative-dogmatic tendency within the HWSP.

12. Tibor Huszár, *Beszélgetések Nyers Rezsővel* [Conversations with Rezső Nyers] (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 2004), 277–278.

13. Ignác Romsics, *István Bethlen: A Great Conservative Statesman of Hungary, 1874-1946* (Hightland Lakes, NJ: Atlantic Research and Publications Inc., 1995), 26.

14. I must admit, though, that it was also publicly known about him that he liked to play chess. But there was no publicity to his other favorite pastime: the very popular, rather lower-class card-game in Hungary, "*Ulti[mol]*." On his private hunting excursions when he slept over at one of the reserves, he had with him a small and rather constant circle of people (General Ferenc Szűcs, surgeon Zoltán Szabó, Kádár's bodyguard Ferenc Sebestyén, and Sándor Tóth, director of protocol hunting and head of the Department of Hunting and Game Management of the Ministry of Agriculture). As Sándor Tóth recollects "In the evenings, after dinner, we had to 'work': i.e., we played *ulti*. . . . Kádár was a very skillful card-player." Author's interview with dr. Sándor Tóth, Budapest, June 25–26, 2004.

15. Cf. Sándor Tóth, *A hírnév kötelez. Vadászat és vadgazdálkodás Magyarországon, 1945-1990* [Obliging Reputation: Hunting and Wildlife Management in Hungary, 1945-1990], (Budapest: Nimród Vadászújság, 2005, 2nd enlarged edition), 126–127. With reference to what I have already written in the *Foreword*, I have to mention here that while my father was invited on a number of occasions to *Egyetértés* (especially to collective hunts of small game such as hare and pheasant), he was not a member of this exclusive club. “Egyetértés” was one or two grades too high for his position. From the late 1950s, early 1960s, he had his own club: the “1st May Hunting Club,” disposing of excellent territories in the Börzsöny Mountains in Northeast Hungary, shared by a membership of relatively high-ranking functionaries of the party-state.

16. *Fácán Matyi* (December) 1970, 5. The author thanks are due to Dr. Sándor Tóth for making a complete set of *Fácán Matyi* accessible.

17. Bányai József, *Világrekord trófeák a Magyar Mezőgazdasági Múzeumban* [World Record Trophies in the Hungarian Museum of Agriculture] (Budapest: Magyar Mezőgazdasági Múzeum, 1994), 9 and 13. János Kádár also figures in this list of world record trophies, with the antlers of a fallow buck he shot in 1972 – *ibid.*, 21.

18. Cf. His letters instructing officials of the National Directorate of Forestry as to which of his (and his wife’s) trophies should be displayed; where he was also careful to see to it to avoid that the visitors of the exhibition should be able to see that they had several trophies from the same date: Kádár to Ernő Zsámbor, March 14, 1960; and G. Balassa to Kádár, December 21, 1960, Kádár János Titkárságának iratai (Papers of János Kádár’s Secretariat), MOL M-KS-288. f. 47. cs. 730. öe..

19. Exchange of letters between Róbert Muray and János Kádár, May 23, 1973. *Kádár János Titkárságának iratai*, MOL M-KS-288. f. 47. cs. 756. öe.

20. MÉM Vadászati és Vadgazdálkodási Főosztály, “Jelentés az Állami Erdő- és Vadgazdaságok 1971. évi működéséről,” Dr Tóth Sándor főosztályvezető, Budapest, January 31, 1972. [Report on the operation of the National Farms of Forestry and Game Management in 1971], by Dr. Sándor Tóth, Head of the Main Department of Hunting and Game Management of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries – in the possession of Dr. Tóth]. This report was qualified “Strictly Confidential” after it was read by some members of the *Egyetértés* Club. As Dr. Tóth told me in the course of my interview with him, several *Egyetértés* members were immensely irritated by all the personal details included in the 18 pages and seven appendices of the report. I am most grateful to Sándor Tóth for having provided me with a copy of this important document.

21. R.J.L., “A férfiak sportja. Huszonnyolcezer puskás ember” [“The Sport of Men. Twenty-eight thousand men with guns”], *Magyar Hírlap*, November 16, 1979. All press materials quoted in this paper have been consulted in the excellent collection of newspaper clippings held by the *Open Society Archives*, Budapest.

22. A visit to Valkó (one of the starting points for hunters visiting the Gödöllő reserve, some 40-50 kilometers East from the center of Budapest) right after working hours on a week-day afternoon was counted as a “hunting day.” The Telki reserve was even closer to Budapest (about 20 kilometers West)—83 of the 90 “hunting days” of Prime Minister Jenő Fock were spent here and it is quite

probable that many of the visits were such short late afternoon tours made without sleeping over.

23. This is quite apparent from the photos published in Sándor Tóth, *A hírnév kötelez . . .*, as well as from MÉM Vadászati és Vadgazdálkodási Főosztály, "Jelentés az Állami Erdő- és Vadgazdaságok 1971. évi működéséről," Dr Tóth Sándor főosztályvezető, Budapest, January 31, 1972 – where Mrs. Kádár and Mrs. Aczél are identified in the Egyetértés's annual game bag as hunters who shot 3 stags and seven boars (Mrs. Kádár) plus one stag (Mrs. Aczél). See also the trophy lists of the Egyetértés Club for 1970-1975: *Trófea Bemutató - az Erdő- és Vadgazdaságok területén 1970. évi bőség idején elejtett szarvas- és dámbikák tróféáiról*. Printed by the Erdészeti Műszaki és Szervezési Iroda, Budapest, in 120 copies—(same for 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975).

24. János Kádár had probably the longest vacation which, according to a source of mine from the mid-1960s was 6 weeks, i.e., 42 days gross (or 36 working days, net). Cf. the "Top Secret!" medical report on the state of health and suggestions for diet and lifestyle for János Kádár by the Central National Hospital of Kútvolgyi Street, signed by hospital director Imre Fenyvesi and Kádár's personal doctor of internal medicine, Imre Gergely, Kádár János Titkárságának iratai, MOL M-KS-288. f. 47. cs. 735. őe. Most of this paid leave, however, Kádár spent on his summer holidays in August, at the party's vacation facilities at the Balaton Lake, in Balatonaliga.

25. For a few examples of such invitations coming in to János Kádár, see Kádár János Titkárságának iratai (Papers of János Kádár's Secretariat), MOL M-KS-288. f. 47. cs. 724. őe. (István Szabó's and Zoltán Szabó's letter to Kádár) and 756. őe. (István Gergely's letter to Kádár).

26. For some of Kádár's contacts with Count Széchenyi and his widow, see Kádár János Titkárságának iratai, MOL M-KS-288. f. 47. cs. 733. őe. and 762. őe.

27. Kádár personally intervened at various points of time to assist the projects of István Homoki-Nagy, a director of feature films with animal casts, with a great deal of footage in areas with the richest wildlife in the country (like Gemenc or the Hortobágy), and with plenty of episodes with hunting. For some of Kádár's contacts with Homoki-Nagy, see Kádár János Titkárságának iratai, MOL M-KS-288. f. 47. cs. 739. őe.

28. For a bibliography of hunting-related literature published in Hungary, see György Vuray, Gábor Fodor Rácz, and Zoltán Szabó, eds., *A magyar vadászirodalom képeskönyve. Vadászat és horgászat az irodalomban és a képzőművészetben* (Budapest: Mezőgazda Kiadó, 2000). The "rehabilitation" of Kittenberger, Nadler, and Széchenyi, "auf Kádárs Wunsch" (according to Kádár's wish) is acknowledged by (Count) Philipp Meran, *Wenn die Wolken weiterziehen: ein Leben für die Jagd* (Graz - Stuttgart: Leopold Stocker Verlag, 1992), 48.

29. For Dénes's case, see his letter to János Kádár, November 16, 1963, as well as the exchanges of Kádár's with Károly Németh and Béla Biszku, all in Kádár János Titkárságának iratai, MOL M-KS-288. f. 47. cs. 734. őe.

30. Author's interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, Budapest, June 25–26, 2004.

31. MÉM Vadászati és Vadgazdálkodási Főosztály, "Jelentés az Állami Erdő- és Vadgazdaságok 1971. évi működéséről," Dr Tóth Sándor főosztályvezető, Budapest, January 31, 1972, 9.

32. Author's telephone interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, October 31, 2005.
33. Imre Szász *Ez elment vadászni . . .* [the title of this book – a documentary report about hunting in the Hungarian countryside – is untranslatable: it is the first line from a children's rhyme (told while playing with fingers), if translated literally it can be rendered as "This [one] has gone to hunt . . ."] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1984), 84.
34. Author's interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, Budapest, June 25–26, 2004. István Dénes to Police Captain Szabó, September 9, 1959, copy, *Documents of the Ministry of Agriculture*, Hungarian National Archives, MOL XIX-K-13-a 174. d. 1959, 58-1/486/1959.
35. For a short biography of Antal Fuchs Sr., see Antal Fuchs Jr., "Id. Fuchs Antal, 1883-1968," in *Száz év, száz vadász* [One hundred years, one hundred hunters], ed. Sándor Békés (Budapest: Millenniumi Vadászati Bizottság, 2001), 86, which confirms that, after 1956, Fuchs Sr. enjoyed again full recognition for his professional competence.
36. "Milliók – kedvtelésből" [Millions, for the fun of it], *Figyelő*, November 27, 1974.
37. F.B., "Nyitott kapuk?" [Open doors?], *Szabad Föld*, December 8, 1974.
38. A couple of examples: "Vadászterület iránti kérelem," MOL XIX-K-13-a, 247. d. 8501/1962; Miskolci Városi Tanács VB. Elnökhelyettese ír a földművelésügyi miniszternek, vt. alakítása és vadászterület kérése (The Vice President of the Miskolc City Council to the Minister of Agriculture asking for territory for and permission to establish a hunting club) MOL XIX-K-13-a 137. d. 1958 25-1/246/1958; A Homokvasút és Kerületi Hányóüzem, MSZMP alapszervezete, Dorog, levele Kádár János et.nak vadászterület elvételének sérelmezése (a low-level party organization to János Kádár, complaining about their hunting territory having been taken away from them), MOL XIX-K-13-a 174. d. 1959, 58-1/138/1959. All these documents, together with others (applications and complaints regarding hunting grounds) are in the Archives of the Ministry of Agriculture at MOL.
39. I happen to know that, in the circles of the party-state apparatus class, especially in Budapest, Varga had a good reputation and enjoyed some popularity also because of his cooperative's semi-private services, on often very advantageous terms, obliging many high officials of the party-state (these services were related to building, renovating dachas, taking care of gardens, etc.).
40. For the related exchanges of letters from October 1985, Kádár János Titkárságának iratai, MOL M-KS-288. f. 47. cs. 774. öe.
41. The share of women among the officially registered hunters of communist Hungary never reached one percent. In 1974, only 80 of about 25000 hunters were women (József Simányi, "Évente több mint tízmillió lövés. Beszélgetés dr. Koller Mihállyal, a MAVOSZ főtitkárával" [More than ten million shots a year. Conversation with dr. Mihály Koller], *Magyar Hírlap*, July 21, 1975).
42. By the time this application was filed, my mother had gone through two major surgeries with slipped disks and she was not at all fit for the physical exercises attendant to hunting. The whole documentation of the case from 1964 can be found in "NEB 'Béke' Vt. részére a Vértesszomszmai 806-os vadászterület bérbeadása," MOL XIX-K-13-a, 324. d. 14. t. 12589 /1964, Országos Erdészeti Főigazgatóság (National Directorate of Forestry, which was a division of the Ministry of Agriculture).

43. Ödön Fácányi, *Egy hajdani vadásztársaság. A Székesfehérvári (Csákvári) Nimród vadásztársaság története 1967-1997* [A hunting club of the past. The history of the Nimród hunting club in Székesfehérvár (Csákvár), 1967-1997] (Budapest: Nimród Alapítvány, n.d.), 23.

44. Interview with Dr. László Fekete-Győr in Ödön Fácányi, *Egy hajdani . . .*, 102.

45. Author's interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, June 25–26, 2004.

46. There were altogether 25 “Young Nimrods,” invited friends, student comrades complementing the numbers of the sons and daughters of Egyetértés members (author's interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, Budapest, June 25–26, 2004). It is disturbing to see the rather cynical manner in which Mihály Koller, general secretary of MAVOSZ, presented to the press the establishment of the Young Nimrod Club (carefully leaving out who actually the members were): “We [MAVOSZ] believe it is extremely important to rejuvenate the membership of hunting clubs and, especially, [to make good use of] the educational effects of the communities of hunting clubs upon the youth. . . . Even a separate club has been established for young people in the vicinity of Hatvan under the name Young Nimród. They work with great enthusiasm; they hunt and they husband [with their resources].” Jenő Csalló, “Vadgazdálkodás és vadászat” [Wildlife management and hunting], *Magyar Hírlap*, / February 1972.

47. Imre Cseterki's letters to János Kádár, from 26 September and October 5, 1972, Kádár János Titkárságának iratai, MOL M-KS-288. f. 47. cs. 774. őe.

48. Author's interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, June 25–26, 2004.

49. Author's interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, June 25–26, 2004.

50. Cf. Szász, *Ez elment vadászni . . .*, 91–92.

51. Author's interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, June 25–26, 2004.

52. Author's interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, June 25–26, 2004.

53. Letter of Pál Ágoston, head of main department, Attorney General's Office, to the National Directorate of Forestry, December 31, 1960, “Vadászati balesetek megelőzésére irányuló intézkedések megtétele” [The implementation of measures to prevent hunting accidents], Papers of the Ministry of Agriculture, MOL XIX-K-13-a 228 d. 117-1/7/1961. See, also here, the response of István Dénes, head of the Department of Hunting and Game Management, January 11, 1961, which tells about a high-level intervention in the matter (strict instructions to stop the anarchistic hunting by functionaries issued to the provincial party organizations by Central Committee secretary György Marosán).

54. The circular, dated April 3, 1964, is printed in its entirety in Sándor Tóth, *A hírnév kötelez. Vadászat és vadgazdálkodás Magyarországon 1945-1990* [Obliging Reputation. Hunting and Wildlife Management in Hungary, 1945-1990] (Budapest: Nimród Alapítvány, 1998, 1st edition), 67–68. Emphasis added. This circular was preceded by a similar circular to all directors of the national farms of forestry by vice minister of agriculture and leader of the National Forestry Directorate, Gyula Balassa, on January 10, 1964. Its subject matter was “Stopping irregular hunting”– published in Sándor Tóth's just quoted book, on page 66. It is highly probable that similar circulars were sent from the Central Committee apparatus to the county and lower level MSZMP organizations.

55. The campaign may have been successful with regard to maintaining the “integrity” of the hunting grounds of Egyetértés. What it could achieve beyond that is highly questionable: a sociological survey made in the first half of the 1980s revealed that the local and national nomenklatura regularly extorted various “favors” [szívesség] from the chairmen of agricultural cooperatives – one of these favors was the arrangement of hunting excursions for them. Cf. Árpád Pünkösti, *Az elithez tartozni. A tézselnőkök kapcsolatrendszere* [Belonging to the elite. The networks of chairmen of agricultural cooperatives] (Budapest: Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóközpont, 1986), 62 and 66–67. The book was qualified as “Belső kiadvány” [intern publication], which meant that it was not publicly accessible.

56. Author’s interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, Budapest, June 25–26, 2004.

57. The document, dated Budapest, February 25, 1974, is reproduced in Tóth, *A hírnév kötelez*, 168–169.

58. I am in the possession of a postcard from Defense Minister Lajos Czinege which he sent to my father on October 29, 1961 from Praha, Czechoslovakia. The photo shows the “Imperial” Sanatorium of Karlovy Vary from the foot of a towering statue on the top of which an impressive mountain buck is standing – the circle drawn by Czinege’s blue pen around the buck on the photo (as if the cross hairs of the gun were already resting on the buck . . .) carried more than half of the message between two comrades who had already shared not only the passion but also a great deal of actual hunting experience.

59. The price information is from Tóth, *A hírnév kötelez*, 246–250; the data for the game bag is from MÉM Vadászati és Vadgazdálkodási Főosztály, “Jelentés az Állami Erdő- és Vadgazdaságok 1971. évi működéséről.”

60. There were 3 passenger cars per 1000 inhabitants in Hungary, in 1960, 23 in 1970 – the same data for Britain are 108 and 215, for Austria are 57 and 161, respectively. Cf. György Péteri, “Streetcars of Desire: Cars and Automobility in Communist Hungary (1958-70),” *Social History* 34, no. 1 (February 2009): 3 and 5. In 1970, only six out of one hundred households owned a car in Hungary (Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században* [The history of Hungary in the 20th century] [Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1999], 479).

61. In 1969, as Dr. Tóth recollected during my interview with him, all the cooks of the National Farms were sent to the famous Gundel Restaurant in Budapest to learn the art of cooking and serving, but when high-ranking foreign guests were hosted, the NFGM relied on the services of the Gundel and Taverna restaurants and their personnel themselves.

62. Author’s interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, Budapest, June 25–26, 2004.

63. “Jelentés az Állami Erdő- és Vadgazdaságok 1971. évi működéséről.” The total for the mid-1980s is from the author’s interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, Budapest, June 25–26, 2004.

64. Author’s interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, Budapest, June 25-26, 2004. We should keep in mind also, that 1st class pork or beef was not always available in retail shops during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1960, the per capita meat consumption in Hungary was 49,1 kilograms, by 1970 it had grown to 60,4 kilograms – cf. Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században*, 479.

65. Author’s interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, Budapest, June 25–26, 2004.

66. For a useful historical overview of hunting in Hungary, from the beginnings to the state-socialist era, see Pál Csőre, *A magyar vadászat története* [A history of Hungarian hunting], (Budapest: Mezőgazda Kiadó, 1994).

67. This is interestingly documented in the private footage of György Pető, a young Jewish businessman of interwar Szeged – cf. the art documentary film of Péter Forgács, *Free Fall* (1996).

68. An instructive discussion of these tendencies can be found in an anonymous note made for Zoltán Tildy, the president of National Bureau of Nature Conservation (Országos Természetvédelmi Hivatal) in 1967. The author of the note undertook to discuss the question why small game populations declined so conspicuously in the postwar era, in comparison to the interwar years (clearly indicated in the national annual game bags of the early 1930s: around 2,2 million of small game, as opposed to around 0,8 millions in the mid.-1960s). The writer of the note suggested to explain the phenomenon as a consequence of changing social composition in the hunters' community and of the increasingly utilitarian attitudes among them. The note, lacking title, date, and author, addressed to "Kedves Zoltán!" [Dear Zoltán!], is an attachment to Kálmán Tolnay's letter to "Mrs. Comrade Fock" (quite probably, Prime Minister Fock's wife who worked within forestry and game management, under Vice Minister Gyula Balassa), September 29, 1967, Papers of the Ministry of Agriculture, Hungarian National Archives, MOL XIX-K-9-aj 28. d. 8.t. 1967. Tolnay had been asked to give his opinion about the note which he now returned. Tolnay was, until sometime in the mid-1960s, the director of the Gödöllő Reserve; before 1956, he was an officer of Rákosi's much dreaded State Security Authority; in the mid-1960s he became the director of the Penitentiary in Dunaújváros. He was also the author of some popular cookbooks specializing in games.

69. Jenő Csalló, "Vadászok és vadászat" [Hunters and hunting], *Magyar Hírlap*, January 8, 1973.

70. Revealingly, when the restrictions were ignored because the hunter of high standing wished to get a better trophy than what he had permission for, it was the professional hunter accompanying him who got penalized. Cf. Dr. János Zoltán, *Legenda és Valóság. Az Egyetértés és a Zalka Máté Vadásztársaság története* [Myth and Reality. The history of the Egyetértés and Máté Zalka Hunting Clubs], ([Budapest?]: Dénes Natur Műhely, 1996), p. 57.

71. Cf. Tibor Valuch, "Changes in the Structure and Lifestyle of the Hungarian Society in the Second Half of the XXth Century," in *Social History of Hungary from the Reform Era to the End of the Twentieth Century* by Gábor Gyáni, György Kövér, and Tibor Valuch (Boulder, Col.: Social Science Monographs, 2004), p. 585.

72. Ferenc Baktai, "Nimródék kétmillió dollárja" (The two million dollars of the Nimróds), *Népszava*, February 24, 1965; Csalló, "Vadászok és vadászat"; "Nem kedvtelés csupán – gazdálkodás" (Not merely pastime – an economic activity), *Pestmegyei Hírlap*, January 12, 1975; Simányi, "Évente több mint tízmillió lövés."

73. Surely, shotguns were used for hunting boar with special ammunition called "pearl bullet" (one single led "pellet" fitting in size the diameter of the pipe of the gun, called "gyöngygolyó" in Hungarian). These bullets were often homemade and could only be used with a particular kind of shotgun (the whole pipe had to be of the same diameter). "Gyöngygolyó" worked only at short range (not more than

30-40 meters) and with low precision. "Gyöngygolyós" hunting had a low status (shotgun with such bullets was "the poor hunter's rifle"), it could only be used in boar hunting, in battues, where one had the chance to shoot at close range.

74. *Trófea Bemutató*, for 1970-1975 and Zoltán, *Legenda és valóság*, 75.

75. Author's interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, Budapest, June 25-26, 2004.

76. Author's interview with Dr. Sándor Tóth, Budapest, June 25-26, 2004.

77. Ferenc Stoflitz, leader of the Telki reserve, who worked before 1945 on the estates of Count Tisza, received a high-level decoration upon his retirement in 1966. Kádár also asked Károly Németh (chairman of the club, at the time first secretary of the Budapest Party Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) to see to it that Stoflitz received invitations from Egyetértés to collective hunts. (Kádár János Titkárságának iratai, MOL M-KS-288. f. 47. cs. 739. öe.) In 1958, Kádár gave Stoflitz a rifle as a gift from him and from Mrs. Kádár to thank for Stoflitz's "diligent efforts on behalf of our pastime." (Kádár János Titkárságának iratai, MOL M-KS-288. f. 47. cs. 720. öe.). According to Sándor Tóth, Stoflitz was Mrs. Kádár's favorite guide on her hunting excursions.

78. Baktai, "Nimródék kétmillió dollárja."

79. It was the case of Sólyom [Falcon] Hunting Club in Vértesszöllös. In the minutes of their July 19, 1959, meeting (where the club was declared to be established), they included the names of István Dobi (President of the People's Republic) and Ernő Mihályfi (General Secretary of the Patriotic People's Front) in the list of members. Indeed, they even "appointed" Dobi to be the 'political officer' [*politikai felelős*] of the club, while Mihályfi got the honorable role of "master hunter" [*vadászmester*]. The MAVOSZ apparently accepted the new club, but the Department of Hunting and Game Management of the Ministry of Agriculture put an end to the club's career in the bud. See István Dénes's letter to MAVOSZ, September 5, 1959, copy, Archives of the Ministry of Agriculture, MOL XIX-K-13-a 174 d. 1959, 58-1/487/1959.

80. István Dénes's letter to MAVOSZ, September 5, 1959, copy, Archives of the Ministry of Agriculture, MOL XIX-K-13-a 174 d. 1959, 58-1/487/1959. Italics added.

81. This has no doubt created tensions among the ranks of the apparatus class reaching the agenda of the highest political decision-making bodies. For example, the Central Committee Secretariat of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party at its meeting on March 25, 1968, discussed a detailed "Report Concerning the Social Status, Economic and Social Situation, and Moral Acknowledgement of Full-Time Political Functionaries." The report and the minutes of the meeting is in the Hungarian National Archives, MOL M-KS-288 f. 7. cs. 299. öe.

82. It was thanks to this symbiosis that little Hungary became by the 1960s and 1970s a most attractive place for West European hunting tourism. Hungarian wildlife management earned an international reputation manifest, among others, in the fact that the World Exhibition of Hunting in 1971 was located to Budapest.

83. Cf. Jan Gross' important essay, "War as Revolution," in *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944-1949*, ed. Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 17-40.

84. A telling document of the early phases of this expropriation-and-imitation of the old ruling classes by the emerging new is the memoirs of Klára Szakasits,

the daughter of Árpád Szakasits, leader of the Hungarian Social-Democratic Party and one of the leaders of the Hungarian Worker's Party (after the merger of communists and social-democrats). On the one hand, this is an account where the author talks about how upset she had been when she saw on a former neighbor a piece of her clothes from her apartment that had been abandoned for some months in the late stage of the war. On the other hand, Mrs. Schiffer also tells her reader in great detail how she, thanks to the high positions of her father and of her husband who was also a leading leftist social-democrat, was offered and accepted in 1945 both a large villa in one of the best areas of the Buda hills and was shown to a huge store house of "ownerless goods" (furniture, carpets, paintings, etc.) from where she could properly furnish her new house. Both the house and the furniture, etc., belonged to the former ruling classes of Hungary (among them high officials in public administration who fled from the country occupied by the Soviet Red Army as well as Jewish victims of the Holocaust and Arrow Cross rule from among the high capitalist middle classes). Significantly, all these "ownerless goods" were disposed of by a governmental agency (*Elhagyott Javak Kormánybiztossága*) jointly controlled and run by the communist and the social-democratic parties. Schifferné Klára Szakasits, *Fent és lent 1945-1950* [Up and down 1945-1959] (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1985), 63-76.

85. Looking beyond hunting and the boundaries of Hungary, an interesting case in point is the career of the *Dacha*, the Russian Summer, or Weekend House, during the Soviet era discussed in Stephen Lowell's superb book, *Summerfolk. A History of the Dacha, 1710-2000* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 118 ff.

Chapter 5

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Holidays and Class Struggle under State Socialism

“Why should we terminate holiday facilities constituted by 3–4 room villas? There are at least 80 of them and we fit in them fine [*Van ilyen vagy 80 és el is férünk benne*]. Who is disturbed by this?”—(Comrade Lajos Fehér at the Political Bureau meeting of April 30, 1963)

“... those who are familiar with this problem know that workers have no access to a vacation facility with 2–3 beds. Practically, these serve the director and the other leaders. These [facilities] will have to be eliminated.”—(Comrade János Kádár at the Political Bureau meeting of April 30, 1963)

PRELUDIUM: NEW SOBRIETY AND THE END OF IT

As early as in November 1956, the Temporary Executive Committee (the early and temporary name of the Political Bureau) of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) instructed the Central Committee's PGO Department to review the system of social benefits offered to the party's salaried employees (the Apparatus) and return to them with suggestions for reform. As it clearly transpires from the contemporary documentation that we have already shown earlier, the initiative had been motivated to a great extent by the desire to radically improve the public image of the (acquisitive) functionary of the party-state—the need to cleanse away all the remaining elements of “Kucseraism.”

Regarding apparatus holidays, however, one of the first measures the PGO presented to the Temporary Executive Committee had another objective as well. As PGO chief, Mrs Pálné Laczkó wrote:

Under the prevailing political circumstances [*a kialakult politikai helyzetben*], the PGO regards the way in which the party operates its vacation facilities to be inappropriate. For their holidays, the members of the party apparatus should rely on the facilities of SZOT [the National Council of Trade Unions], while the party's holiday resorts, after giving away the uneconomic units, should be transferred into the hands of a profitable, public holiday enterprise to be established [by the party]. . . . The party will be in the future greatly in need [of such incomes].¹

"Prevailing political circumstances" in Budapest, in November 1956, could be read in several ways. One entirely possible reading is that the apparatus class needed to exhibit a great deal of restraint in its generosity toward itself when it came to the various perks it had tended to entitle itself to. But there is another just as plausible reading at that time: in the political turmoil and uncertainty prevalent in the first couple of months after October 23, it was still not clear whether the reformed communist ruling party (the MSZMP) will be able to continue to rule as a *de facto* as well as *pro forma* monopolist of the political domain. A limited, shop-window pluralism seemed still a distinct possibility, with resurgent coalition era (1945–1948) parties around. Under *these* circumstances, "prevailing political circumstances" meant both the idea that the symbiotic relationship between the government's budget and the funding of the party apparatus might be in jeopardy and that the legal grounds for the MSZMP to assert a claim to the properties of Mátyás Rákosi's Hungarian Workers' Party (MDP) might prove less than solid enough. Thus, the MSZMP leadership wished to avoid the risk of losing the party's highly attractive holiday facilities as much as they wanted to create a potentially significant source of income by stashing the finest holiday hotels and villas away into a public company operating to the benefit and under the control of the MSZMP. A PGO report from December 1957 delivers proof of this idea underlying the establishment of the *Hungária-Balaton Tourism Company*:

The [Hungaria-Balaton Tourism] Company has been created by resolution nr 10.044/1956 of the Council of Ministers [the Government] in December 1956. Its main task was to utilize the party's holiday facilities for the purposes of vacationing visitors from abroad. To secure profitability, the Company was by its charter expected to carry on various other activities as well (establishing high-end restaurants, camping sites, etc.).

*Establishing the company enabled us to save this part of the party's property. It has failed, however, to perform its basic task [generating significant incomes by catering to foreign, especially Western tourists wishing to spend their holidays in Hungary – G.P.], due to the boycott by the capitalist countries.*²

While the intention was also for the company “primarily to offer holidays for foreigners and thus to secure higher profit and [hard] currency [incomes],”³ the party leadership meant just as seriously to maintain a restrictive attitude regarding the perks made accessible to the party-state apparatus class—a deliberate policy on behalf of the MSZMP leadership in the early years of their counterrevolutionary rule. As Mrs Laczkó told the economic leaders of the county party organizations:

We have discontinued the earlier [pre-October 1956 – G.P.] system of holidays for the party apparatus whereby all employees of the party had the right to use the party’s holiday facilities free of charge while, at the same time, a mere 8–10% of the workers organized in trade unions could have holidays annually. From now on, even the party employees will get holiday vouchers through SZOT. . . . The essence of the issue at hand is that the party-workers [*pártmunkások*], the heirs and successors of the professional revolutionaries, should live worthy of the name, they should live modestly.⁴

If living modestly meant, as Mrs. Laczkó seems to have suggested, to have to pay for one’s (and his family’s) Summer vacation, to have to accept that in any year less than a tenth of the apparatus could have their holidays at the heavily subsidized costs at a facility of the National Council of Trade Unions (SZOT) —facilities which, incidentally, were far more modest in the comforts they offered and of far lower quality in terms of the scenery, the bathing and/or hiking opportunities, and so on, than the party apparatus’ holiday infrastructure—then the party-state’s apparatus class thought “living modestly” was not an agreeable occupation.

The uproar against measures of new sobriety addressed all aspects of the apparatus class’ everyday and private life, and it was particularly loud about the new, highly disadvantageous order of vacationing. Only a few representatives of the Budapest and county party organizations abstained from protesting against the new order at the same May 24th meeting where Mrs Laczkó appealed to the ethos of “professional revolutionaries.” Comrade Sándor of the Nógrád County Committee of MSZMP told the meeting

“the issue of holidays next year, and even this year, is a highly sensitive matter. For we were told by the [PGO of the Central Committee] to approach SZOT for holiday vouchers, but SZOT told us to apply for vouchers to the Trade Union of Public Servants. However, TUPS provided only 3% of the vouchers we asked for. They think it has been a mistake to give away the [party’s] holiday resorts, at least some of them should have been kept.”⁵

Comrade Erdész, PGO leader of the Fejér County MSZMP Committee conveyed the opinion of the county apparatus according to which “we have gone to the opposite extreme, none asks for keeping all the holiday

resorts, but we do need some of them, [we should have kept] at the least as many as the other [governmental] organs have; there is no need for this exaggerated modesty."⁶ Comrade Friedmann of Veszprém County spoke also on behalf of all the functionaries at the county party committee, emphasizing that giving away the holiday resorts was ill-advised "for if the comrades had ever been in real need of rest, now they surely are."⁷ István Kertész of the mighty Budapest party committee did not mince his words. He pointed the finger at the "grey eminence" (József Sándor, the conservative communist, *ouvrierist* department chief of Central Committee Department of Party and Mass Organizations) behind the decision because of which the party no longer had any holiday resort.⁸ He found also outrageous [*felháborító*] the fact to whom the party's well-furnished holiday resorts were transferred to and then, he concluded by saying this:

For years we have been talking about how immoral it is to have holidays free of charge and that we should pay for it. This was ignored at the time. Now, however, we have gone all the way to the other extreme. We do not belong anywhere. . . . He doesn't know what is worth more for the party: the incomes the Hungária-Balaton would bring in or the regeneration of the party-workers [functionaries]. This [matter] needs to be [re-] considered urgently by the appropriate organ [*illetékes helyen*].⁹

These were reactions the party leadership couldn't afford of ignoring—and if someone in the leadership still believed it was possible to ignore the discontent brewing among the ranks of the apparatus class, he was forced to reconsider when the same discontent started receiving a sympathetic hearing from members of the highest leadership. On the October 14, 1957 meeting of the Central Committee's PGO both CC Secretary Jenő Fock and Gyula Fodor, Chairman of the CC's Committee of Revisions (the main party disciplinary body of the time and also the party's economic auditing authority) participated. Chairman Fodor conveyed the opinion prevalent among the members of his high-level committee: "the party doesn't need to do business out of the party's holiday resorts—we shouldn't offer vacations to the tailcoats [*ne a frakkos embereket üdültessük*]. For example, Paris doesn't need to know that the party owns the [country's] best holiday resorts, and it does business with these."¹⁰

Less than a year after the introduction of the new, "modest" regime of holidays for the party apparatus, we find the party leadership to have started backing down and yielding to the mounting pressure to unmake the reforms. A resolution of the Central Committee Secretariat dated December 20, 1957, abolished the Hungária-Balaton Company effective December 31, 1957. In its stead, the party's holiday resorts were taken over for future operation by the newly established *Üdültetési Vállalat* (Holidays Company) working under the control of the MSZMP Central Committee,

with the PGO as their immediate supervisor.¹¹ There was no longer talk about “modesty” nor about making big profits or earning a great deal of hard currency for the party. The PGO’s way of talking about the holidays of the party apparatus had tangibly changed. PGO department head, Mrs. Laczkó, in her proposals to the Secretariat for the 1958 holidays of the functionaries, had this to say:

In 1957, the holidays of the party’s employees received only a temporary solution. This problem must be taken care of. In 1957 we were able to secure approximately 1000 persons’ holidays with the help of SZOT vouchers. . . . In many cases, the needs were in excess of the limited possibilities, even though, [when vouchers were received] the comrades could have their holidays together with their families in most cases. With the liquidation of the Hungária-Balaton Tourism and Holiday Company it will become possible for us to secure the holidays of members of the party and KISZ [the Communist youth organization] apparatuses at a level 10% above that of the Governmental departments.¹²

Entrusting the National Council of Trade Unions (SZOT) with the provision of holidays to the party apparatus meant that the latter lost not merely its exclusive rights to the highest quality holiday resorts until then owned by the party, but it brought with it also that the statistical chances for a member of the party apparatus to get a holiday voucher dropped significantly and came closer to those of the simple unionized workers and lower level clerks in the state-owned economy. Regarding this, we should keep in mind that seldom more than 8% of the total of trade union membership had the good fortune to go on holidays in one or another of SZOT’s resorts, in any year of the Kádár era. The PGO, with the help of the top leaders of the party, managed to persuade SZOT to increase the “contingent” of vouchers going to party functionaries but even with the help of this increase hardly more than 10–15% of the party apparatus could be provided with vouchers. As the PGO report put it “The operations of [Hungária-Balaton] Company don’t assist the solution of the tasks of the party and it is not reasonable to secure financial means for the party in this manner.”¹³ By the end of 1957, it was also clear for everybody in Hungary that the MSZMP will not need to allow any other party to operate in the domain of politics and that there would be no entity to compete or vie for MSZMP properties.

“Hungária-Balaton” concluded its less than a year-long career by the resolution of the MSZMP CC Secretariat to liquidate it. The same resolution ordered the establishment of the new Holidays Company owned by and working only for the MSZMP apparatus, to take care of and operate the holiday resorts of the party. Concurrently, the CC Secretariat resolved that in 1958, 45% of the total capacity of the party’s holiday resorts should

be utilized by the SZOT to the benefit of workers of large-scale industries, while 55% should serve the employees of the party and the communist youth organization (KISZ). This seemingly generous gesture toward the “ruling class of socialist society,” however, should not lead us into believing that the measures taken at the end of 1957 were a continuation of “new sobriety” creating a more fair and just distribution of high-quality holiday opportunities. Considering that in the same decision the CC Secretariat also instructed SZOT to secure 1,060 holiday vouchers for party employees (even requiring that almost half, 45% of these vouchers should take the party employees to the holiday resorts owned by the party!) and considering also that the 45% of total capacity to be offered to SZOT was performed by way of granting access to the party’s resorts in the low season (Spring, Autumn, and Winter), not in the Summer when, understandably, most people wished to enjoy their holidays—I would suggest that what happened in December 1957 was a termination of the policies of “new sobriety” and a back-sliding to the Orwellian social order of “all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.”

A report about the party functionaries’ experience with holidays in 1960 regretfully registered that it proved hard to secure the distribution of holiday opportunities between those with SZOT vouchers and those who received their vouchers directly from the PGO to the party’s holiday resorts. Employees of the party and the communist youth organization took up 72.9% of the total, while those from without the party apparatus who luckily got into the possession of SZOT vouchers constituted only 27.1%. It transpires from the report that the proportions prescribed by the December 1957 CC Secretariat resolution the PGO failed to deliver even in the earlier years. The explanation was rather curious, question-begging, and revealing. Head of the PGO’s holidays section, Gyula Köbli, emphasized

The deviation to the benefit of the party employees has been a result of the increase in capacity—for example, [the increase of capacity] at Balatonaliga II,¹⁴ to which we only admitted party employees. We have been trying to honor the Secretariat’s resolution in the manner that in the [holiday] season we transferred only a minimal number of vouchers to the SZOT, while the great bulk of vouchers were made accessible to them during Winter time, before the beginning and after the end of the season, except for the period of Christmas [and New Year’s Eve when, again, the party employees had exclusive access to the party’s holiday facilities – G.P.]. Due to the increased need for holidays in the party apparatus we were unable to secure the prescribed 45% [for the SZOT] last year and, predictably, we won’t be able to secure it in the next year either. The shift in the proportion has been affected also by the fact that compared to 1957, the size of the party apparatus grew by 36.6% – according to our data, the number of employees in the party apparatus

was 4631 on September 30, 1957, and 6304 on December 12st, 1960. The need for holidays by those working in the party apparatus grows together with their numbers and we won't be able even in the foreseeable future to meet these needs within the frameworks of the prescribed percentages [whereby the party was to give away through the SZOT 45% of its resorts' capacity to workers – G.P.]. . . . With the improvement of their economic situation [*anyagi helyzetiük javulásával*], the party's functionaries exhibit an increasing interest for holidays.¹⁵

The post-1956 policies of moderation or “new sobriety” trying to redress an untenable situation characterized by the lack of distributive justice, heaping material advantages in the hands of a privileged party-state apparatus class, were not only terminated but took, in terms of actual practices, a U-turn. The argument for this seems to have been that the greater the dimensions of the apparatus class and the more well-to-do they are, the more social-material advantages they need and should be given. Indeed, the above quoted PGO's report, over holidays in 1960, proudly presented the aggregate data according to which

“16.8% of the apparatus had access to subsidized holidays—at the daily cost of Forints 14. The average annual share of workers who receive holiday vouchers from the SZOT is 8% [and a great majority of these workers couldn't take their families with them – G.P.]. . . . 7.1% of the party apparatus has been awarded bonus holidays [holidays free of charge]. Everything considered, 41.2% of the party apparatus benefitted from [organized] holidays together with their family members.”

The fact, then, that a substantial part of the costs of the holidays arranged by SZOT for workers and other employees were covered by the National Holidays Fond managed by the Ministry of Finance, not only failed to counteract the skewed distribution of subsidized holiday opportunities but, indeed, it gave, out of public funds, a sizeable extra bonus to the social group (the party-state apparatus class) that managed to carve out a considerably larger (and far the best quality) slice of the total of publicly subsidized holidays for itself. The December 1957 resolution of the CC Secretariat instructed the Ministry of Finance that “Similarly to the holidays arranged by SZOT, the Ministry of Finance should pay the same public contribution towards meeting the costs of party holidays.”¹⁶

But the holidays of the party apparatus received funding from public resources not merely through the social-political subsidies going out to most of those granted access to the holiday resorts of party and state authorities or the trade unions. The MSZMP apparatus as a whole operated in a symbiotic relationship with the state's annual budget. Of course, their expenditure was always in excess of the revenues, the gap being bridged from the government's annual budget by the Ministry of Finance right after the CC

Secretariat's resolution approved the party's annual budget on the basis of the plan submitted by the PGO. The revenues generated by the party's holiday infrastructure were limited, coming mainly from the modest fees paid in by the party employees who got holiday vouchers to the party's resorts and, to a lesser extent, from the sales of fruits, vegetables, and wine by the farm owned by the party in Arács, on the northern shore of the Balaton lake, one of the better wine-producing regions of the country (see table 5.1).

On the average, public funding (the annual budget of the Hungarian People's Republic) met around three-fourth of the costs of the party apparatus's holidays every year. The significance of these perks landing almost invisibly in the party functionaries' pockets is well demonstrated by a statistical compilation from the end of 1964.¹⁷ In 1964, there were 449 persons on the payroll of the MSZMP Central Committee. Of these, 327 (72.8%) could enjoy holidays at the party's resorts, and to the costs of which the party (the Hungarian state) contributed 1,786 Forints—almost exactly the average monthly income (Ft 1,757) at the time of the full-time employed in the Hungarian economy.¹⁸ Ranked by the average size of the benefit, here are the three most important items that, in addition to their salaries, kept the functionaries happy: see table 5.2.

As we can see, holidays (and a readily available and accessible infrastructure of holiday resorts that regularly enabled a large portion of the apparatus class to have subsidized vacations) constituted probably the most important (because most widely enjoyed) privilege of the party (and party-state) functionary. The personal use of car was only accessible to the top elite, but even behind the average monetized value (1,786 Ft) of the holiday subsidies we would find a considerable variation of actual values appropriated—after all, two weeks spent undisturbed in a luxurious villa of Balatonaliga II was not comparable to the standard fortnight a lower level functionary could count upon in the hotel of Balatonaliga I, Balatonföldvár, or Tihany. Overall, however, the party's holiday resorts and the entitlement to them was many levels above any existing alternative, and therefore a highly precious possession that none in the party apparatus was ready to trade for the 7–8% chance in any year to get a holiday voucher from the National Council of Trade Unions (SZOT). In this, as we soon shall see, there was complete agreement between the party and the state side of the party-state apparatus class.

THE CHALLENGE TO AND STRUGGLE OVER ACQUIRED PRIVILEGES

In the short but instructive history of “new sobriety” policies of the early months of János Kádár's counterrevolutionary regime, what happened

Table 5.1. The Annual Budget of the HSWP and the Expenditure and Revenues of the HSWP Holiday Resorts, 1963–1976 (data in 000s of Forints)

	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967
Expenditure	409641	432107.4	401586.7	445770.0	461837.0
—on Holiday resorts	23065.3	25616.4	30936.9	32740.0	33555.0
Revenues	254565.5	287561.5	342305.1	376660.0	417230.0
—from Holiday resorts	7054.3	6154.4	6232.6	7275.0	7632.0
Revenues/Expenditure of Holiday resorts	30.6%	24.0%	20.1%	22.2%	22.7%
	1968	1970	1973	1975	1976
Expenditure	526993.0	633192.0	834543.7	959720.7	1038664.3
—on Holiday resorts	35.533.0	40660.0	60862.7	86735.2	75290.0
Revenues	462366.0	588963.0	728580.5	898108.3	984215.1
—from Holiday resorts	7643.0	8544.0	16910.6	16847.5	19418.2
Revenues/Expenditure of Holiday resorts	21.5%	21.0%	27.8%	19.4%	25.8%

Source: data for 1963 and 1964: MOL 288. f. 37/1964 5. öe., fol. 38; for 1965: MOL 288. f. 37/1965 4. öe., fol. 63; for 1966 and 1967: MOL 288. f. 37/1967 2. öe., fols. 12-13; for 1968: MOL 288. f. 37/1968 2 öe., fol. 15; for 1970: MOL 288. f. 37/1970 3. öe., fols. 18-19; for 1975: MOL 288. f. 37/1975 1. öe., fol. 109; for 1976: MOL 288. f. 37/1976 3. öe., fol. 115.

Table 5.2. Non-Monetary Benefits Received by HSWP Central Committee Functionaries (1964)

<i>The Benefit Received</i>	<i>Number of Recipients</i>	<i>Cost (Value) of Benefit (average per head of recipients)</i>
Gratis Pre-school for Children of Functionaries	19	33526.31
Personal Use of Car	42	12241.28
Subsidized Holidays	327	1785.93

Source: "A Központi Bizottságnál felmerülő béren felüli juttatások" (Benefits received in addition to salaries by the employees of the [HSWP] Central Committee), dated December 1, 1964. MOL 288. f. 37/1964 5. öe., fols. 12–13.

within the party apparatus was but one of at least two major chapters. The party leadership felt that even the heirs of professional revolutionaries in *the state apparatus* needed to prove their modesty and their preoccupation with "building socialism" rather than their acquisitive lust and selfish yearning for a good life.

Similarly to the right to get paid leaves from one's work to recuperate and spend time with the family, taking a holiday was declared to be a right (a social benefit) to all employed in the "people's economy," even though this right came for those employed in agricultural cooperatives with a significant delay. From the beginning of communist rule (1948), it was regarded to be self-evident that vacationing should be organized publicly, preferably by some macro agency with mandates over all the holiday facilities existing in the country. As in all other spheres of life, individualistic forms (family-owned summer houses, weekend cottages, dachas, etc.) were considered to give rise to suboptimal and ineffective use of resources, besides being fraught with inequalities and injustice in society—and all this was just about everything that ideally the state-socialist social order was expected to ameliorate and eventually put an end to. This is the spirit informing the first communist era document spelling out the main principles along which the reorganization of vacationing in the country was to take place. The economic policy department (*Állam-politikai Osztály*) of the Hungarian Workers' Party's Central Committee produced in August 1948 a strictly confidential "Note on the order of vacationing." The note, after a review of the prevailing situation as to capacity, performance, and costs in 1947–1948, laid out the following principles:

1./ Vacationing should be organized and directed nationally by the Council of Trade Unions.

2./ Holiday resorts belonging to trade unions, companies, public institutions, public bodies, and public authorities should be subject of central supervision and direction by the Council of Trade Unions.

3./ The Council of Trade Unions should be granted representation in the management of sanatoriums.

4./ Holiday resorts not listed under paragraph 2 should be individually considered whether they should be brought under central direction and supervision.

5./ The Council of Trade Unions should exercise its mandate of general direction and supervision through [the relevant] trade unions.

6. The immediate supervision is to be taken care of by the [branch and other relevant] trade unions.

7./ Appropriate and full use of the holiday resorts should be secured. To achieve this, the material management, the operation of the kitchens, maintenance, public health and social supervision, cultural activities, public supplies, etc. of the resorts should be rationalized.

15./ The fee to be paid for subsidized vacationing should increase progressively in relation to the earnings of the beneficiary.¹⁹

As we can see, the idea to entrust the trade unions and their National Council (after 1956, SZOT) with the centralized administration of all holiday resorts subsidized out of public funds came very early. But the rational arguments about gains to be made on larger scales and out of better use of capacity and resources due to the planned all-embracing co-ordination and management had not come early enough. For we can also see (as described in paragraph 2 of the document quoted above), that by 1948, the field of vacationing as a social-political institution had come to constitute a patchwork of several different avenues along which "social vacationing" (*társadalmi üdültetés*) emerged. From 1945 on, in the scramble to secure holiday resorts for their own employees, not only trade unions but also the increasingly nationalized industrial and other enterprises, public corporations, and national authorities (including the various government departments /ministries) made everything in their power to lay their hands on desirable properties taken away from their previous private owners (victims of the Holocaust, high officials of the pre-1945 regime, members of the former capitalist and land-owning classes, etc.). The more-or-less spontaneous "acquisitioning" of holiday resorts from the late 1940s well into the early 1950s is well documented in the trade union archives carrying exchanges about desirable houses, villas, and properties well suited for the role of holiday resorts and about the methods to appropriate them and pleas to central authorities for assistance.²⁰ The resulting institutional structure of "social vacationing" was an ever-changing hodge-podge of holiday resorts run by industrial and other companies of the socialist state, municipalities, territorial organizations of state

power (county and district councils), trade unions at the level of industrial branches or at the national level, or governmental departments and other national authorities. But the individual components of this “hodge-podge” were far from equal with one another. In terms of capacity in relation to the number of those with access as well as in terms of quality (the buildings, the furnishing and, most importantly, the scenery and access to valuable hiking and/or bathing possibilities), the distribution of the resources serving “social vacationing” in the various listed sectors was heavily skewed. It was skewed to the benefit of the state (and party) apparatus class and to the disadvantage of the working class having no other opportunities for “social vacationing” than what the trade unions and their workplaces (industrial and other state-owned enterprises) could offer. Embarrassingly for a social order that prided itself on being ruled by workers and peasants, compared to the industrial workers, only the situation of the agricultural cooperative peasantry was worse.

Against this background, it comes as a little surprise that the policy of “new sobriety” inspired a recurrence of the idea that a central management should be asserted in the field of social vacationing by way of placing all publicly owned resorts under the National Council of Trade Unions (SZOT). Within its own ranks and branch organizations, SZOT tried to push back the tendency of a distribution of holiday vouchers heavily skewed in favor of members in hierarchical positions above the level of “physical workers.”



Figure 5.1. János Kádár at the Soviet Presidential Holiday Resort, Barvikha, Outside Moscow, 1977. *Source:* Fortepan/Album059, Photo nr 217245.

In the late 1950s–early 1960s, in terms of the rough categories “spiritual” vs “physical” workers, they tried to secure that at least 65% of the vouchers would go to the latter category. These efforts invariably failed, as is clearly shown in the documentation of the trade union archives. On its November 19, 1960 meeting, the Presidential Council of SZOT was discussing, among other matters, the social composition of the recipients of holiday vouchers in 1959 and 1960.²¹ The SZOT apparatus proudly reported that they executed all the tasks defined in the Presidential Council’s November 1958 resolutions, except for the resolution about the social composition of those receiving vouchers. The execution of the resolutions, which prescribed that 65% of the voucher recipients should be physical (manual) workers, failed. While there had been some improvements, they wrote, quite a few of the industrial branch unions lagged behind the 65%—the metallurgical workers’ union stopped at 59%, the powerful *Vasas* union (miners, energy-producers, and heavy industrial workers) at 64.2%, the union of chemical industries at 57.7%, the union of workers in the agricultural, food industries, and water-management at 52.7%. (In 1958, only 47.5% of the beneficiaries of their vouchers were physical workers.) Considering that in 1960, the share of “physical workers” among the economically active population as a whole was 83% and that it was even in 1970 as high as 75%,²² even the 65% target was undoubtedly falling short of addressing the issue of the “non-physical” category being overrepresented among the beneficiaries of holiday vouchers from the trade unions. The report of the SZOT apparatus also reveals that the unequal distribution of holiday opportunities in the resorts disposed of by SZOT got even more pronounced in their top-quality facilities (*kiemelt üdülők*). These were the finest resorts in SZOT’s possession, at places like in the Mátra mountain (Galyatető, Mátraháza), the Bükk mountain (Lilafüred), in the Mecsek mountain in Southern Hungary (outside the city of Pécs), as well as in Sopron, in Western Hungary. In this respect, *Vasas* was the only trade union delivering 65%, while all the others performed a meager 30.5%.

THE REFORM PLANNED, RESOLVED, AND NEVER IMPLEMENTED

At the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, latching on the ruling party’s policies of new sobriety, the hope of the SZOT leadership was that gaining the role of highest authority in the management of social vacationing will enable them to achieve a more equitable distribution of holiday opportunities.

The reform received the blessings, in principle, of the highest party authority in June 1962. But the Political Bureau resolution of June 12,

1962, decided only that they wanted to see elaborate proposals for the establishment of a unified management of subsidized vacationing. The SZOT leadership (quite probably with the support and encouragement of department chief József Sándor, of the central committee's Department of Party and Mass Organizations supervising on behalf of the party the trade unions) saw this as an opportunity to acquire at long last the *leading role over all vacationing that received subventions from public funds* and to take over the operative management of all holiday resorts that were run at the expense of the state budget. They expected that the reform would be discussed in detail and accepted by the top decision makers of the socialist state and thereafter SZOT could announce the change at the XX Congress of the Hungarian Trade Unions scheduled to take place May 9–12, 1963. This transpires from the two draft submissions most probably by SZOT's Main Department for Holidays from September 1962 titled "Note for the documents of the Plenary Session [of the Congress]." ²³ In the September 4 document, they emphasized

To satisfy at a higher level the needs for holidays among the workers, the trade union movement should be prepared to take care of the tasks of national coordination and policymaking [*elvi irányító*] with regard to subsidized vacationing and to gradually take over and integrate into the trade union frameworks the holiday facilities that have been maintained at the expense of the state budget.

In a second (undated but most probably later) document, they outlined some concrete details, setting 1965 as the deadline for the trade unions to take over from the party and state authorities all the tasks related to policymaking, coordination, and control over the field of subsidized vacationing, but they also wrote

In the same period, i.e. from the Autumn of 1963 until the end of 1965, it should be implemented that SZOT takes over even from the point of view of practical day-to-day management all those holiday facilities [*üdülőképületeket*] that today are run, at the expense of the state budget, by the Party, the armed forces, the government departments, national authorities, municipal authorities, and other official organizations and institutions.

After the transfer of the holiday facilities, the employees of these authorities and organizations cannot receive subsidized holidays in percentages greater than the percentage prevailing nationally [within SZOT vacationing].

...

Holiday facilities of the Party should be transferred to SZOT by Autumn 1963, of the armed forces, ministries [government departments], and na-

tional authorities by the Autumn of 1964, of other budget-dependent organs (municipal authorities, offices, institutions) by Autumn 1965.

Somewhat contradicting the above outlined main objectives, but no doubt signaling the awareness of the SZOT apparatus of the mighty roadblocks that might be standing in their way, they also wanted to exhibit respect and understanding toward the needs of the employees of the mightiest authorities of the country. In an undated proposal presented to the SZOT Secretariat, most probably by the SZOT Main Department of Holidays, they suggest the following:

Considering the large-scale inequalities in the distribution of opportunities for subsidized vacationing and, at the same time, considering also the interests of the organs formerly owning the holiday resorts to be taken over, we suggest that members of the party apparatus and the armed forces should be allotted subsidized holiday vouchers to the extent of 75%, while the [other] organs funded by the state budget should receive vouchers up to 50% [of the capacity of] what used to be their own holiday resorts²⁴

All the anxiety apart, these drafts show clearly that the SZOT apparatus was confident they would soon be able to take over the holiday resorts of the party apparatus and the various governmental authorities, and thus at least on the longer run, to secure a more equitable distribution of subsidized holiday opportunities among their members. In fact, this seems to have been the prevalent expectation even at high levels of the party apparatus well into 1963. Dezső Lakatos, the head of the Central Committee's Department of Administration and Economic Management (PGO), said this to the participants of the April 1, 1963 national meeting arranged for economic managers of the county-level party organizations:

Anyone familiar with the situation of the country in terms of vacationing would also know that in this matter a peculiar situation prevails within the party and that we should be prepared for a future when the vacationing capability of the party will diminish. . . . The idea in the Political Bureau is that within a few years' time all vacationing should be managed within the frameworks of SZOT and that we should put an end to the existence of such big inequities between different sectors.²⁵

But there were also signals of ambivalence and half-heartedness from the side of the party leadership. Early February 1963, SZOT sent over a "feeler" to the PGO of the Central Committee of MSZMP, a set of proposals suggested to reform the system of subsidized vacationing with SZOT assuming a central role in it.²⁶ The proposals start out from the usual and typical rationality arguments that there was a need for unified, centralized policy of vacationing, for developing the country's holiday infrastructure,

instead of the present decentralized set of uneconomic, irrational, and so on, practices by various organs with holiday facilities at their disposal. The solution suggested was that SZOT should act as the central authority of unified management of all subsidized vacationing that receives funds directly or indirectly from the state budget. The "Proposals" show that the SZOT apparatus started out with some radical ideas in the beginning. They emphasized that employees of the high offices losing their holiday facilities will have no privileged access to vacation opportunities in higher proportions than the national average. While they made exception for the party's and the armed forces' holiday resorts with special tasks (receiving high level foreign guests, serving as venues for confidential conferences, etc.), they insisted that between the Autumn of 1963 and 1965 all holiday facilities of the party, the armed forces, and other offices, authorities which offer subsidized vacationing to their employees funded by the state budget should surrender their facilities to the SZOT.

The reaction of PGO Chief Dezső Lakatos can be summarized as saying "not so fast!" He suggested the political bureau should in general give their consent to the unification of vacationing and even to the transfer of holiday facilities to SZOT, although at a later point in time. Lakatos thought the PB should send out a committee composed of the delegates of the party, SZOT, the council of ministers, and the armed forces, to elaborate on the principles and norms of the future unified management of vacationing, the distribution of places for vacations, and the system of control. This same committee should identify those holiday facilities that should be exempt from the unified system as they serve special objectives (facilities belonging to the party, the council of ministers, and the armed forces). He wished to see more realism in the timing of the transfer of holiday facilities so that the high authorities/offices from where the facilities are taken will have a chance to prepare their employees for the changes. He also requested to state as a principle that the authorities from where holiday facilities would be taken should retain for several years privileged access to a certain percentage of the capacity of their former facilities over and above their annual allotment. Lakatos also urged that before the political bureau would discuss the proposals, they should be sent to all department chiefs of the central committee apparatus—obviously because he believed the proposals materially affected the whole party-state apparatus class over which the CC department chiefs exercised the party's supervisory powers.

On April 30, 1963, the proposals were discussed by the Political Bureau, and that led to a resolution (a) stating that the PB "acknowledges that the completely unified system of subsidized vacationing cannot be implemented for the time being" and (b) suggesting that "the Presidium of SZOT and the Minister of Labour Affairs submit their proposals to the

Council of Ministers [the Government] within a month."²⁷ The revised proposals were prepared by mid-June and they still targeted (for takeover by SZOT) some 135 holiday resorts with 5,042 accommodations (beds) over the country. Interestingly SZOT's list over these "*hivatali üdülők*"²⁸ (rest houses belonging to various authorities/offices) included not only those of national authorities and government departments but also some "properties" of lower organizations (e.g., district councils, Sopron City Hospital, universities, etc.) in the interests of whom the "national authorities" did not speak.

But the usual procedure for proposals suggesting a decree to be issued by the council of ministers and/or its economic commission (the top economic policy collegium within the government) was that those who submit the proposals had to consult and gain the consent beforehand of all the national authorities (or whose field over which they exercised supervision) that the proposals affected. In other words, SZOT were obliged to approach all the ministries (government departments) and other national authorities and ask for their comments for eventual amendments and for their consent to go ahead and submit the proposals to the EC. This procedure opened a surface where workers' interests (represented by SZOT arguing for a more equitable distribution of vacationing opportunities) and the interests of the party-state apparatus class (represented by various leaders of government departments and national authorities) clashed and where the cause of socialist distributive justice suffered a predictable defeat.

In June 1963, the SZOT Secretariat circulated SZOT's and the Ministry of Labor Affairs jointly prepared draft proposals for the economic commission among 37 ministries (government departments) and national authorities, asking these to make their comments on the proposals by July 5. A summary of the responses was produced within the SZOT apparatus on October 8, 1963.²⁹ As the document reveals, the proposals would have affected 274 holiday resorts, 135 buildings with 5,042 accommodations (beds). Of the 37 high authorities approached only eight gave their consent to the draft proposals. Most of them agreed to the suggestion that SZOT should take over from the Ministry of Labor Affairs the mandate of national management (policy making) and coordination of subsidized vacationing as well as to the policy of encouraging companies to build vacation facilities out of their own funds. But it was also an overwhelming majority of them (29 ministries and national authorities) who disagreed with, protested against, and/or had substantial objections to the suggestion that SZOT should take over the holiday facilities funded out of the state budget. It is also revealing that of the eight high offices that gave their consent, three were exempted from under the planned government decree (Ministry of Defense, Ministry of the Interior, and Ministry of

Foreign Affairs), one was partnering SZOT in developing and promoting the proposals (Ministry of Labor Affairs), and two had no holiday facilities of their own.

As the author[s] of an earlier summary³⁰ complained

A general characteristic of the incoming responses is that they fail to relate to the intents and direction of the proposals [*nem az előterjesztés tendenciáját elemzik*]. Instead, they confine themselves to demonstrate what kind of harm and disadvantage they would bring to the employees of the national authority in question if their holiday facility were to be transferred [to the SZOT].

To be fair to those objecting to the proposals, they did not protest only against “the harm and disadvantage” to their own employees. As a matter of fact, many of the leaders (ministers, vice ministers, presidents, etc.) of these high offices protested on behalf of the “public servants” at large whose situation in terms of incomes and social benefits they claimed to have been already inferior compared to their counterparts working at companies in various industries and trade. They noted that SZOT did not wish to take over the holiday facilities built and run by the companies of socialist industries and trade. On the contrary, they suggested the government should encourage them to establish more such facilities. They, indeed, protested against the proposals because these would have reduced the public servants’ access to subsidized vacationing to the level of the average member of the trade unions (both in terms of quantity and in terms of quality).³¹ István Sarlós, president of the Municipal Council of the Capital City of Budapest, believed the proposals were politically objectionable because, if implemented, they would undermine what had already been achieved in terms of living standards in the field of vacationing. Minister of Agriculture, Pál Losonci suggested the holiday facilities of the ministries and other national authorities should remain in the hands of the latter “as long as the vacationing of the employees cannot be provided by SZOT at the level provided today [by the ministries and national authorities at their facilities], for this is what secures the better and cheaper satisfaction of the employees’ needs for holidays.” Dr. Frigyes Doleschal, minister of health, was convinced, the transfer of holiday facilities in the possession of government departments would merely “lead to a deterioration in the situation of thousands of employees without any tangible improvement with regard to holidays nationally.” According to György Péter, president of the Central Office of Statistics, the proposed measures constituted “an infringement upon the rights of public servants.”³²

Due to the overwhelming rejection by the governmental authorities, the SZOT was compelled to make a renewed attempt. On September 30, 1963, SZOT President János Brutyó invited 25 members of the government

and leaders of national authorities to meet and discuss the suggested reform with SZOT representatives. The discussion took place on October 9 and already the fact that only 14 of the 25 invited attended must have been rather disheartening for the trade union leaders. The documents produced within the SZOT apparatus in preparation for the meeting included yet another summary "Review of the opinions about the draft proposals to the Economic Commission" dated July 26, 1963.³³ According to this review, the draft was sent to altogether 30 authorities. Nineteen of these disapproved of the proposal that SZOT should take over the holiday facilities of the various national authorities. Nine of them accepted or abstained from taking a position. Seven of them could only see their way to accept the proposal on the condition of some modifications in the proposal, and two of them (MTSH and MSZMP) had no comments to give. Another document serving the preparations for the October 9 meeting is the "Note about the number of employees receiving subsidized vacations in 1962," undated but, considering other documents in the same folder, most probably from July 1963. It started with statistics revealing the inequalities that SZOT wished to ameliorate with the help of the reform.

The share of those receiving SZOT vouchers within the trade union membership is 7.5%. The vacations of about 40–50% [of the employees of the ministries and national authorities] are secured. Based on [the suggested GB] draft resolution, 25% of the employees of the ministries and national authorities will continue to receive subsidized vacation vouchers. . . . The national average of the share of employees receiving subsidized vacation opportunities is 15%. This proportion in SZOT vacationing is 7.5% of the trade union membership. There are entities the employees of which have no other vacation opportunities at their disposal than the 7.5% SZOT vacationing. At the same time, some high offices [*szervek*] can secure vacations for 60–70% of their employees.

I have found no minutes of the meeting of October 9, but we know that a month after the meeting SZOT did again circulate their draft proposals to be submitted to the economic commission. In the accompanying letter of November 14, 1963, János Brutyó claimed the new draft had been a result of amendments SZOT made in the light of the earlier written responses as well as of the October 9, meeting.³⁴ The suggested government decree was sent out a bit later, on November 20.³⁵ While this version too upheld the policy of wishing to turn SZOT into the central policy making and controlling authority over subsidized vacationing, it no longer stipulated the transfer of the ownership (or possession) of the vacation facilities from ministries and national authorities to the SZOT. Instead, it not only requested all these entities to run their holiday facilities in agreement with SZOT's regulations and norms but would also make SZOT

the single issuer of vouchers to these facilities, and SZOT would place these vouchers at the disposal of the trade union organizations in these entities. These trade union organizations would then have the sole right to grant vouchers for subsidized vacations. In other words, SZOT came up with an amendment of their proposals in the spirit of King Lear who wanted to "outsource" all the nuisance and trouble of ruling the country to his daughters but keep for himself all the pleasures yielded by royal power. The governmental and other national authorities were welcome to remain the owners of their holiday facilities and stand for the tasks and costs of management, maintenance, personnel, and so on, while the usufruct rights of all those properties would belong to SZOT and the trade unions.³⁶ According to the revised proposals, SZOT would start exercising these rights from January 1, 1965.

It comes as a little surprise, then, that the response from the ministries and other national authorities was just as devastating as in the first round.³⁷ Only ten out of the 36 high offices receiving the proposals and the draft decree gave their consent. Revealingly, a majority of those national authorities who agreed to SZOT's proposals did so because they had no stake in the matter (either because they did not possess any holiday facilities of their own or because their facilities had been from early on exempt from the sway of the proposed government decree), like the Ministry of the Interior (their holiday facilities were not covered by the decree), the Central Commission of People's Control (they had no holiday facilities at all), the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers (their holiday facilities were not covered by the planned decree, but the two departments within the secretariat that would have been affected sent responses refusing to give their consent), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (their holiday facilities were not covered by the planned government decree), and five more. Three national authorities sent no comments at all (Ministry of Defense, with holiday facilities not covered by the planned decree), the Ministry of Justice, and the National Office of Planning, whose weekend facilities would not be affected either. "Yes" responses to the proposals came also from organizations that responded "Yes" in general, but "No" regarding the use by SZOT of their own vacation facility.³⁸

The gesture included in the amended proposals that the ministries and authorities would receive, as a maximum, vouchers up to 26% of the capacity of their holiday facilities (while the rest would be integrated in the general pool of holiday vouchers held and distributed by SZOT and its member unions) failed to prove attractive enough as compared to the status quo. The challenge to the privileged position of the party-state apparatus class regarding subsidized vacation opportunities came to an inglorious end under the "workers' and peasants' state." By the mid-1960s, the policies of "new sobriety" had been abandoned in the belief

that the general improvement in the living standards of the lower classes in Hungarian society made people more concerned about their own increased well-being than about their comparative disadvantage in relation to the ruling class. As the department chief of party economic affairs tried to reassure the functionaries objecting to the policies of “new sobriety,” “When the general [economic and political] situation improves, the simple workers [*egyszerű dolgozók*] will no longer find it important to attentively follow how the social ‘achievements’ of the apparatus develop.”³⁹ With all the exemptions that had already been granted to the facilities held by the MSZMP apparatus, the Ministries of Interior and Defense, etc., it would have been hard, if not outright impossible anyway to explain and justify why to try and make other government departments and national authorities to accept the loss of their holiday resorts.

After a long year of wrangling, the top political leadership yielded to the pressure from their own brethren, the apparatus class. On February 18, 1964, the Political Bureau of MSZMP “recognize[d] that the implementation of its previous resolution on the unification of [subsidized] vacationing has been resisted by various organs. The considered opinion of the Comrades was that if the resolution needs to be modified indeed, based on serious arguments, a suggestion has to be submitted to the PB.”⁴⁰ At its June 16, 1964 meeting, then, the PB



Figure 5.2. From Right to Left: János Kádár, His Wife, Kádár’s Primary Physician Dr. Rétsági György with His Wife, at MSZMP’s Holiday Resort, Balatonaliga II, 1983. Source: From the collection of the Archives of Political History and Trade Unions, Budapest, 765. f. 2. cs. 168. öe., fol. 2.

proceeded to modify their own resolution of April 30, 1963. They decided to no longer insist on the implementation of the first paragraph of their resolution stipulating that "the holiday resorts of the ministries and national authorities sustained by the state budget should be taken over by the SZOT."⁴¹

Perhaps hoping for a miracle to happen or merely to save face, the SZOT leadership went on presenting new, revised (and increasingly tame) proposals to the MSZMP Political Bureau, which is manifest in the note prepared within the SZOT apparatus on November 11, 1965. The note reported about new proposals that were submitted "to the relevant comrades of the Party's central apparatus" in July 1965, and it added, with a melancholy undertone,

The opinion of the Comrades was that the relevant instances of the Party are in general in agreement with the proposals, [but] they would not bring them onto the agenda yet, only after the issues listed below or, possibly, in the first half of 1966.

- (1) The new or proper definition of the basic principles of the [new economic] mechanism.
- (2) The place and role of the trade unions in the present context—a theme [that] will probably be taken care of in a resolution by the Party Congress.⁴²

Putting it plainly, this meant that the party leadership decided to downgrade the matter to the category of low priority and to postpone its resolution indefinitely. While in 1962–1963, the idea of a truly unified system of subsidized vacationing under the management of SZOT still had political momentum, thanks to some powerful supporters, like CC department chief József Sándor and János Kádár himself (see figures 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3), by 1964–1965, all the hot air had gotten out of the balloon. A draft document produced by SZOT's Main Department for Vacationing reviewed the years since 1949 from the point of view of subsidized vacationing of the workers. It lamented over that the share of those trade union members who could enjoy such holidays was diminishing from 8.3 to 7.1%, at the same time as "The ministries and [high] offices in general can secure [subsidized] vacationing to 40–50% of their employees."⁴³ That remained the case for the rest of the era of communist rule in Hungary. Even in this respect, the greed of the party-state apparatus class won over its professed egalitarian creed.



Figure 5.3. János Kádár on the Porch of One of the Villas of Balatonaliga II (1984).
Source: Fortepan/Album059, Photo nr 217261.

NOTES

1. PGO proposal for the Temporary Executive Committee (*Ideiglenes Intéző Bizottság*), dated November 22, 1956. MOL 288. f. 37/1957/4. ö.e., fols. 129–138. Of course, the PGO proposals must have been made upon the initiative of one of the higher bodies of the party (the CC Secretariat, the CC Organizing Committee or the TEC itself), or of their supervising Central Committee Secretary (Jenő Fock) at the time.

2. Mrs Pálné Laczkó, Head of PGO, Strictly Confidential Report dated December 3, 1957, Minutes and documents of the MSZMP Central Committee Secretariat's December 20, 1957 meeting, Agenda nr. 6 "Proposals for the 1958. holidays of the workers of the party apparatus," MOL M-Ks 288. f. 7/18. öe., fols. 42–43. Emphasis added.

3. "Report of the activities of the PGO after October 23, 1956" signed by József Sándor. MSZMP Central Committee PGO papers, MOL 288. f. 37/1957/1. öe.

4. Mrs. Pálné Laczkó, head of MSZMP Central Committee PGO, Introductory speech to the national meeting of the Budapest and county party organizations' economic department leaders, May 24, 1957. The text of the speech was sent to Central Committee Secretary and PB member, György Marosán, May 23, 1957, MOL 288. f. 37/1957 5. öe.

5. MSZMP Central Committee PGO papers, Minutes of the meeting held for economic department chiefs of the county party committees, May 24, 1957, MOL MSZMP Central Committee PGO, 288. f. 37/1957/1. ö.e., fol. 77.

6. Loc. cit., fol. 78.

7. Loc. cit., fol. 80.

8. József Sándor was member of the Central Committee, deputy head of the PGO between July 1954 and October 31, 1956; member of the Organizing Committee of the MSZMP between November 11, 1956, and February 26, 1957; head of the MSZMP Central Committee PGO from November 16, 1956 and February 26, 1957; and head of the Department of the Party and Mass Organizations of the MSZMP Central Committee from February 26, 1957 through December 5, 1963.

9. Loc. cit., fol. 88.

10. Minutes of the PGO department meeting of October 14, 1957, *MOL M-KS* 288. f. 37/1957/1. ö.e., fol 15.

11. Minutes of the MSZMP CC Secretariat's meeting of December 20, 1957. *MOL M-Ks* 288. f. 7/18. ö.e., Agenda nr. 6 – proposals for the 1958 holidays of the party apparatus.

12. Mrs. Laczkó Pálné, MSZMP PGO, "Javaslat a pártapparátus dolgozóinak 1958. évi üdültetésére" [Proposals for 1958 holidays of the party apparatus], December 19, 1957, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1957/1. ö.e., fols. 246–248.

13. Strictly confidential "Report on the operations of the 'Qualitas' Engineering Bureau, the Hungária Balaton Tourism and Holidays Company, and the General Construction and Furnishing Company," dated December 3, 1957, signed by Mrs Pálné Laczkó, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1957/1. ö.e., fol. 43.

14. Balatonaliga was arguably the finest holiday resort at the Balaton Lake, in the possession of the party. It consisted in two units: Balatonaliga II (a set of villas with a sizeable central service building with restaurant, movie theatre, etc.) provided for the comforts of vacationing top functionaries of the MSZMP; while the hotel-like infrastructure of Balatonaliga I served the holidays of lower-level functionaries, almost exclusively from the CC and the counties' apparatus.

15. [Gyula] Köbli, head of the Holidays Section of the MSZMP CC Department of Party Economy and Administration, "Jelentés az 1960. évi üdültetés tapasztalatairól" (Report on the holidays of 1960), nr. Pgo/1852/2, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1960 2. ö.e., fols. 17–28.

16. Minutes of the MSZMP CC Secretariat's meeting on December 20, 1957. *MOL* 288. F. 7/18. ö.e. Resolution concerning agenda nr. 6.

17. PGO, "A Központi Bizottságnál felmerülő béren felüli juttatások" (Benefits received in addition to salaries by the employees of the [MSZMP] Central Committee), dated December 1, 1964. *MOL* 288. f. 37/1964 5. ö.e., fols. 12–13.

18. According to the data published by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office at https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_hosszu/h_qli001.html last accessed on September 23, 2021.

19. "Feljegyzés az üdültetés rendjének kérdéséről," Strictly confidential note by the Economic Policy Department (*Állampolitikai Osztály*) of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party, August 4, 1948, "on the order of vacationing." The note and the principles it laid out constituted the basis of the Chief Economic Council's (the government's highest economic policy making body) resolution nr. 3.428-3.202/1948. G. F. Sz, *Politikatörténeti és Szakszervezeti Levéltár* (Archives of Political History and the Trade Unions, hereafter SZKL, Budapest), Fond 9, 628. öe.

20. "Üdülők állami kezelésbe vétele (feljegyzések, klf. iratok) 1949–1952-ig és 1961–62" [Taking over holiday resorts by the state (notes, msc. documents), 1949–1952 and 1961–1962], SZKL, Fond 9, II. 238. öe.

21. "Előterjesztés az Elnökség részére az 1959. évi üdültetésről, and 1960. évi üdültetési tervről (költségvetésről), valamint az 1960. évi üdülési beutalójegyek felosztásáról" [Submission to the Presidential Council concerning vacationing in 1959, the plan/budget for vacationing in 1960, and the distribution of the 1960 vouchers], SZKL, Fond 9, II. 24. őe.

22. Cf. KSH, *Életszínvonal 1960–1980* (Living standards 1960–1980, nr. 488 of the series *Statistikai Időszaki Közlemények*, Budapest: KSH [Central Statistical Office], 1981), 18.

23. "Feljegyzés a Plénium ülés anyagához," SZKL, Fond 9, 126. őe., Dossier nr 2, "Jav.[aslatok], hat.[ározatok] az üdülésről [Proposals, resolutions concerning vacationing], 2, 1963–65." The first note was dated September 4, 1962, the second was not dated but can be assumed to have originated from a later point of time in the same Autumn. In none of the cases was the author of the document identified, but the submissions were prepared in preparations for the upcoming congress and its resolutions, by the part of the SZOT apparatus supervising and organizing vacationing nationally on behalf of the SZOT.

24. "Előterjesztés a SZOT Titkársága részére" (Proposals for the SZOT Secretariat), undated typescript, with handwritten note on top of page 1: "Draft/Comrade Bölcsföldi," most probably from the end of 1962 or early 1963. SZKL, Fond 9, 126 őe., Dossier no. 2, "Jav., hat., az üdülésről, 2, 1963–1965" (Prop[osals], res[olutions] concerning vacationing, 2, 1963–1965).

25. Dezső Lakatos's response to the questions/comments from the participants of the April 1, 1963 national meeting for economic managers of the county party organizations. MOL 288. f. 37/ 1963 2. őe.

26. "Javaslat a kedvezményes üdültetés egységes irányítására" – Proposals (undated) from SZOT and PGO response to them, dated February 9, 1963. MOL 288. f., 37/1963. 2. őe.

27. April 30, 1963 meeting of MSZMP Central Committee PB, agenda nr. 3 "The unified management of subsidized vacationing," MOL 288 f. 5/299. őe.

28. Enclosures nr. 1-2 to the Submission to the Economic Commission (GB), June 13, 1963. SZKL, Fond 9, 125. őe. and III. 2. őe.

29. Department chief Péter Fülöp, to József Veres, Head of Main Department, SZOT, Feljegyzés . . . "A SZOT hatáskörének bővítése a kedvezményes üdültetéssel kapcsolatban" című előterjesztés-tervezet véleményezése. (Responses to the draft proposal concerning the expansion of SZOT's mandates with regard to subsidized vacationing," typescript, copy, dated October 8, 1963. SZKL, Fond 9, 124. őe. See also the earlier "Feljegyzés," typescript, copy, dated September 7, 1963. "Note . . . regarding the unified management of subsidized vacationing," a summary assessment of the responses from the various national authorities. SZKL, Fond 9, 123. őe.

30. "Feljegyzés," typescript, copy, dated September 7, 1963. "Note . . . regarding the unified management of subsidized vacationing," a summary assessment of the responses from the various national authorities. SZKL, Fond 9, 123. őe.

31. For these "class level" arguments see the commentaries sent to the leaders of SZOT by Dr. Rezső Trautmann, Minister of Building Industries, November 25, 1963, SZKL Fond 9, 123. őe.; Emil Tasnádi, President of the National Office of Innovation, June 26, 1963. SZKL Fond 9, 125. őe.; Sándor Sebes, First Deputy Minister of Domestic Trade, July 3 and November 26, 1963, SZKL Fond 9, 125. őe.,

and 123. őe.; István Sarlós, President of the Municipal Council of the Capital City of Budapest, July 3, 1963. SZKL Fond 9, 125. őe.; György Péter, President of the Central Office of Statistics, June 27, 1963 and November 23, 1963. SZKL Fond 9, 125. őe. and 123. őe.; Mrs. Józsefné Nagy, Minister of Light Industries, November 28, 1963. SZKL Fond 9, 123. őe.; Gyula Manek, Vice President, Hungarian Office of Standardization, June 28, 1963. SZKL Fond 9, 125. őe.; Pál Losonci, Minister of Agriculture, October 15, 1963. SZKL Fond 9, 124. őe.; Dr. Ferenc Lévárdi, Minister, Ministry of Heavy Industries, November 27, 1963., SZKL Fond 9, 123. őe.; Károly Garamvölgyi, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Finance, November 25, 1963. SZKL, Fond 9, 123. őe.; Dr. Gyula Szekér, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Heavy Industries, July 8, 1963, SZKL Fond 9, 125. őe.

32. For references regarding these reactions, see the previous note where the names are provided, and the letters quoted are localized.

33. “Brutyó elvtársnál az 1963. október 9.-i értekezleten résztvevő elvtársak” [Comrades participating in the October 9, 1963 meeting in the office of comrade Brutyó] and “Kimutatás a Gazdasági Bizottsági előterjesztés-tervezetre adott véleményekről, Bp. 1963. Jul. 26.” (Review of the opinions about the draft proposals to the Economic Commission, July 26, 1963), SZKL Fond 9, III. 2. őe.

34. SZOT President János Brutyó’s circular, dated November 14, 1963, to leaders of national authorities and government departments, SZKL Fond 9, 123. őe.

35. “A Magyar Forradalmi Munkás-Paraszt Kormány . . . /1963. . . . számú rendelete,” draft, typescript dated November 20, 1963. SZKL, Fond 9, 123. őe.

36. See also “Feljegyzés” (Note), typescript, copy, no date, no author, SZKL, Fond 9, 123. őe. – for a short and pointed articulation of SZOT’s objectives with the revised proposals.

37. Mrs. Róbert Asztalos [probably of SZOT’s Chief Department of Vacationing], typescript Note, on the matter of “A SZOT hatáskörének növelése a kedvezményes üdüléssel kapcsolatban” (Concerning the enhanced mandates of SZOT over subsidized vacationing). SZKL Fond 9, 123. őe.

38. “Feljegyzés a Gazdasági Bizottság előterjesztésére az egyes minisztériumoktól és főhatóságoktól érkezett észrevételek tárgyában” (Note regarding the commentaries received from certain ministries and national authorities on the proposals for submission to the Economic Commission), dated December 27, 1963. SZKL Fond 9, 123. őe.

39. Mrs. P. Laczkó’s speech to be delivered at the national meeting of leaders the party-economic and administration sections of the county party organizations, May 24, 1957, as sent over to Central Committee Secretary György Marosán, MOL. 288. f. 37/1957/5. őe., fols. 27–28.

40. SZKL, Fond 9, III. 2. őe. Dossier titled “12/1965/M. Előterjesztések az irányítóhatóságokhoz és azok véleményezése. Jelentés a Pártközpont felé. a II. ötéves terv végrehajtásával és a Szaksz. Kong. határozatok végrehajtásával kapcsolatban” (Submissions to leading authorities and commentaries on them. Report to the central party apparatus with regard to the implementation of the 2nd five-year plan and of the resolutions of the Trade Union Congress). Short typescript, on the top with handwriting: “Resolution over an oral submission.”

41. MSZMP Intéző Bizottság (PB) June 16, 1964 meeting, MOL M-KS 288. f., Agenda no. 5 – “Proposal for the modification of the PB’s April 30, 1963 resolution

concerning the unification of subsidized vacationing” – resolution (minutes p. 5). This was the meeting, where the Lajos Fehér and János Kádár revealed their opinions about villas run as publicly owned holiday facilities – quoted in the motto of this chapter.

42. SZKL, Fond 9, III. 2. őe. Dossier titled “12/1965/M . . .”

43. “Vázlat – a dolgozók kedvezményes üdültetéséről” (Draft – on the subsidized vacationing of workers,” dated June 28, 1965. SZKL, Fond 9, III. 2. őe. Dossier titled “12/1965/M . . .”

Chapter 6

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Forgetting the Simple Art of Walking

The Social Order of Apparatus Mobility

In 1973, Professor Artúr Kiss, Head of the Department of Philosophy of the Karl Marx University of Economics, in his essay on the “Mode of Consumption of a Socialist Type,”¹ set for himself the task of no lesser ambition than defining what “the socialist mode of consumption” was and, on the basis of such a definition, to articulate policy proposals concerning the directions in which consumption should be steered during the next three or so decades.² His writing is one of the numerous manifestations of the systemic *Angst* obtaining among communist elites in the 1970s over certain perceived tendencies of convergence (among them the growth of consumerism)—an anxiety over the sustainability of the state-socialist social order as a “social formation” distinct from modern capitalism. He started out by quoting André Gorz’s critique of Eastern Europe’s state-socialist societies for what had appeared to Gorz to have been their ever-stronger tendency to imitate patterns of “the capitalist model.”³ Of course, Kiss disagreed with Gorz’s “evaluation,” but he admitted that Gorz’s work highlighted a very significant issue—the question, namely,

Whether the mode of consumption prevalent in the developed capitalist countries can be seen as the “classical” trajectory of development which all societies, including socialism, will have to go through? Or is it rather the case that each society [meaning each “social formation” in the Marxian sense – G. P.] has its own mode of consumption, in which case socialism, while it will and should certainly learn from the experience of developed capitalist societies, will develop a structure of consumption of its own. The first view is shared by protagonists of various convergence theories, like that of the “industrial society,” and by economists and even politicians of a pragmatic

orientation. The second view expresses the Marxist standpoint and, therefore, it entrusts the practitioners of politics and economy with the task of developing the model of consumption for the socialist society.⁴

Professor Kiss continues then modestly to deliver his contribution to the solution of this task, by way of outlining a set of criteria with the help of which one could develop and/or identify a “socialist mode of consumption.” At a general level, Kiss saw as the *differentia specifica* of this mode of consumption in what he claims to have been the tendency of socialist society, on the one hand, to satisfy at an ever improving level the ever broadening scale of needs of the masses and, on the other hand, to increasingly eliminate the differences between various social groups so that “Even social groups who were at a disadvantage earlier in catering for themselves, will share a consumption structure of a higher level.”⁵ This enticing horizon of the longer term future, inspired by the socialist realism propagated in political-economy-of-socialism textbooks⁶ current in higher education at the time, co-existed in Professor Kiss’s text with the much less encouraging but excusable present order of things where even some basic needs (like housing) of large groups of “the masses” were not satisfied, on the one hand, and where high incomes and accumulated savings of the relatively few well-to-do required a “diversification of consumption,” on the other. The argument was that, to achieve dynamic development, socialist societies had to accept and use individual self-interest as a motivating force, and therefore they had to accept a strong social stratification in terms of incomes and fortunes too. These requirements were rooted, as the Marxist–Leninist doctrine of the time claimed, in the “transitory nature” of socialism, a social formation which was “no longer capitalism but not yet communism,”⁷ and it had, in Professor Kiss’s view, a major impact upon the “mode of consumption” under socialism:

... exactly, to motivate to work better, the leading forces of [socialist] society have to see to it that members of the high-income group [*a magas jövedelműek*] should be able to use the economic and other resources remaining in their hands to the optimal satisfaction of their needs. Shortly, it is an absolute necessity to allow them to wield their purchasing power. Inescapably, this will lead to an increased complexity [*sokszínűvé válás*] and diversification of consumption, on the one hand. At the same time, on the other hand, it also generates increased inequality in consumption in that one must enable those possessing large volumes of purchasing power [*sic!*] to buy such goods as [are proportionate with and] can serve as an outlet for their economic means. (Villas, expensive jewelry, luxury food, luxury cars, luxury clothing, etc.)⁸

Kiss at this point attaches the following endnote to his text:

From this situation it becomes understandable why it was untimely by Khrushchev to launch the suggestion to go over from the system of private

cars [*magángépkocsik*] to a system of rental cars owned by the state. If there is excess purchasing power, its use will demand the marketing of such high value (if not necessarily high utility value) goods that can absorb this purchasing power (and the sale of cars to private individuals as well as letting them to take care of the costs of operating these cars, can belong to this group of goods). This situation requires us to tolerate or, in some cases (when it comes to the high-income groups) even silently to encourage certain such values manifest in consumption that established themselves first in the developed capitalist countries. It is a different issue that the tolerance exhibited towards selected elements of an alien consumption model will affect even those masses [in society] whose economic situation doesn't allow them to follow suit. This policy [of tolerance] by the socialist state evokes social tension in them or encourages them strive to achieve the mode of consumption characteristic of the people in higher status. (This mode of consumption will by default be regarded to be of a higher order by virtue of the social position of those who [can] enjoy it.) Considering its potential mass basis, this tendency might prove to be dangerous to socialist development and the self-conscious forces of socialism must fight actively against it by the consistent assertion of the requirements of the superior socialist mode of consumption and by convincing propaganda.⁹

The reasoning of Professor Kiss needs to be taken seriously because it reveals some aspects of the dilemma that communist modernizing elites had to confront after Stalin. To put it shortly: If individual performance and achievement is to decide one's social and economic position in a not-yet-communist social order, because this is what propels modern development, how to secure that this development is not toward "capitalist modernity," not even only toward "modernity in general," but toward *socialist modernity*? If "the socialist mode of consumption is characteristically collectivist" and "the bourgeois mode of consumption is individualist,"¹⁰ what are the chances of a "socialist mode of consumption" under socialism, where one has to accommodate the consumer desires of a (socialist) high-middle class, the group disposing of "large volumes of purchasing power," even if these desires steer development toward individualist rather than collectivist patterns?

Of course, even his contemporary reader had good reasons to wonder what Professor Kiss may have meant by a "consistent assertion of the requirements of the superior socialist mode of consumption," particularly as he himself maintains that this "superior mode" cannot and should not at all be asserted in relation to the well-to-do groups of socialist society. The reader may have been rather skeptical also about the chances of a "convincing propaganda" in counteracting the demonstration effect of higher middle-class practices in consumption. (We may even surmise that Professor Kiss did share this skepticism with our imaginary reader.) Yet, Kiss's discussion is helpful, in that it points in the right direction if we are to understand the patterns in which modern consumption

developed under state socialism: everyday practices in elites and higher social classes tend to assert themselves not only as normative criteria for policy makers (themselves a significant part of the social elites under state socialism) but also as the single most important source of inspiration for the rest of society.

In what follows, I will try and show what the “socialist mode of consumption” was up against when it came to the everyday practices of the party-state apparatus class in terms of personal mobility in communist Hungary between 1957 and 1981. I will do so by taking a close look at the everyday practices of mobility in what constituted the core of the communist political class: the members of the salaried apparatus of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (MSZMP), from the level of district committees up to the “White House” of *Jászai Mari tér* (the square where the national party headquarters, that is, the apparatus of the central committee had their offices). These *apparatschiki* (functionaries) made up the core of what can be called the ruling class of the state-socialist social order. They exercised most of the prerogatives of the monopolist of political activity in this order: the ruling communist party. They supervised the state, its various branches, from the level of the parliament, the presidential council and central government down to the communal authorities in the counties, districts, and smallest villages.

The bulk of my sources consists in documents from the Department of Party Economy and Administrative Management (PGO) of the central committee of the MSZMP.¹¹ This is probably the least known of the departments of the central committee apparatus for its task was to take care of and exercise control over the internal economic and administrative management in the central, regional (county), and district organizations of the party, that is, in all units that drew funding from the annual budgets of and used various resources rendered by the MSZMP. The PGO monitored the development of general personnel management (including salaries and incomes) in the party apparatus and supervised the management of the economic affairs of the whole national party apparatus, including the planning for the annual budgets of the MSZMP, controlling, and enforcing proper use and accountancy of monetary and other material resources in the various party organizations, and even matters pertinent to the welfare issues of the party apparatus.

Among the duties of the PGO was to secure a proper infrastructure enabling the mobility of the apparatus at all levels, including an infrastructure of automobility (i.e., cars, garages, repair, and other services for the cars). They took care centrally of the procurement and distribution of cars among the county, city, and district party organizations, they designed the regulations to be observed in the use of cars (and other means of transportation) within the party organizations, and it was also their

duty regularly to control and report on the practices of mobility (most importantly: the use of cars) obtaining in the various district, regional, and central party organs. The PGO executed thorough controls of economic administration (almost always covering the practices observable in the use of cars) sending a group of revisors to at least a third of the county-level party organizations (18 counties and the party committee of the capital city of Budapest) annually. They often conducted inspections in the various departments of the central committee apparatus too. The corpus of reports generated during these controls through a quarter of a century makes up a large and most important segment of the empirical material I draw upon in this chapter.

Before we start the discussion, a few words need to be said concerning the changing dimensions of the ruling party's apparatus. As has been mentioned earlier, resolute as it was in exercising its counterrevolutionary terror, the MSZMP leadership made serious attempts from early on also to create a new era denying a great deal of continuities with the pre-revolutionary Stalinist regime of Mátyás Rákosi. One rather under-studied aspect of these efforts was János Kádár's policies to assert and consolidate what he called "socialist legality" (*szocialista törvényesség*) — a communist idea of the *Rechtsstaat*, a rule-of-law principle which was intended to be imposed not, of course, in order to bring the communist party-state under democratic control, but certainly to discipline the political class (the various "apparatuses") of the party-state and to force them to obey their own laws and norms defining the borderlines between legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, moral and immoral. As a regime disciplining its own elites, Kádárism could not (and did not want to) prevent the members of these elites from seeking-promoting their own private interests, but it did want to keep the tendency to assert elite self-interests within confines to prevent it from generating social tensions and conflict.

One of the signs of the "new sobriety" of early Kádárism was the downsizing of the party apparatus. The number of apparatschiki (political employees [*politikai munkatársak*] as distinguished from the technical and administrative personnel employed by the party organizations) was 7,156 at the end of 1955, dropping to 5,995 by the end of June 1956, whereafter it dived all the way down to 2,708 by the end of 1957. It then fluctuated between 3,500 and 4,000 during the long decade between 1959 and 1970. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, it bounced back to levels between 5,500 and 6,000 persons, to drop below 5,000 again by the last year of communist rule, 1989.¹²

Data as to the total number of personal cars disposed of by the party apparatus are rather sporadic. A report from 1960, concerning accidents in which the party's cars were involved, reveals the situation prevalent in 1959, when altogether 715 cars were divided between the central

apparatus (283 cars) and functionaries of the provincial organizations (432 cars).¹³ According to a memo produced by the PGO and dated October 21, 1965, the total number of cars available for the party apparatus as a whole was 686.¹⁴ In the light of a statistics attached to a summary report from a nation-wide control of the number and use of cars held by public organizations in Hungary, we also know that in 1971 the mobility of the party apparatus was served by 800 cars, while employees of national authorities (government ministries and departments, etc.) enjoyed the comfort rendered by 900 cars. By then, state-owned and cooperative firms constituted the single largest category of public car owners, with 28,550 personal cars, primarily at the disposal of the company executives of socialist economy.¹⁵

We can thus consider 750 cars and 4,000 members of the apparatus as rather good approximations of the average obtaining in our era. If we therefore calculate with the period's typical family size (2+2) and suppose that the relative share of married people within the population of apparatschiki followed the same pattern as in Hungarian society as a whole (62%), we can extend our guesswork and suggest hypothetically that the apparatus class were the breadwinners for altogether (and certainly not more than) about 11,500 people. These estimates yield among the apparatus class a car provision index (excluding their own private cars!) of 15 person/car (compared to 123 person/car as the average for the whole Hungarian population in the period between 1960 and 1971). The average density of cars in the same social circle and period was above 65 cars per 1,000 persons, while in the whole of Hungarian society it was three in 1960, 10 in 1965, and 23 in 1970. We can tell more exactly that car density among the apparatus in 1959 must have been around 71 cars per 1,000 persons (apparatschiki and family), at a time when for the Hungarian society the density of cars was 3/1,000 (1960). As members of this group also excelled themselves in acquiring private cars (a phenomenon we will discuss in greater detail later), it is not at all far-fetched to claim that the actual stratum-specific density of cars in apparatus circles corresponded to levels observable in several Western European countries in the 1960s and 1970s. *Thus, in terms of mobility, "modernity," exhibiting similar patterns to the modern everyday as it emerged in the "capitalist West," came to the political class of the party-state about three decades earlier than to the rest of Hungarian society.*

"IRRESPONSIBLE LOVE OF COMFORT," SNEAKING PRIVATIZATION, AND ATTEMPTS AT THEIR CONTAINMENT

One of the early reports about the situation in matters of mobility in the apparatus is the August 29, 1957 resolution of the central committee

secretariat "on certain issues of party economic work." The resolution registers that "The counter-revolution devastated most of the means of transport at the party committees' disposal. Reparations are not yet completed. Motorbikes and bicycles are still not taken care of. The cars occasionally (motorbikes and bicycles often) are used for private purposes."¹⁶ What the resolution refers to is the illegitimate use of the party's cars for private purposes—a *sneaking privatization* of the mobility attainable by the cars (as well as by motorbikes and bikes),¹⁷ although not of the car ownership itself.

Throughout our period, there was a tug-of-war going on between the apparatus trying to maximize their private possession/use of the party's cars, on the one hand, and the party's regulatory and disciplining authorities (the PGO, the Central Committee of Revision, and the Central Control Committee) trying to curb this urge to privatization and keep it within some acceptable confines.

At a meeting in May 1957, held by the PGO with their county department chiefs, Veszprém county committee's economic department chief put the blame for the functionaries' illegitimate use of cars (and motorbikes) on the central decision that had cancelled earlier regulations allowing the use of party cars for personal purposes. He was emphatic about his department's embarrassing predicament in their relation to other members of the county apparatus:

Comrade Friedmann . . . says that there had been a serious deterioration in work discipline. Today, even though the economic department enjoys greater respect (the county executive committee of the party grants them greater autonomy), there are still political functionaries who despise them because of the unpopular measures they had to take against lax work discipline, against the unnecessary use of cars [*megszüntették a felesleges kocsizást*] and against illegitimate payments of reimbursements.¹⁸

The PGO in Budapest was early out in its attempts to stem and prevent an escalation of malpractices in the use of cars. With reference to a government decree from February 1957, regulating the use of state-owned lorries for the employees' private purposes at industrial firms, the PGO accepted that, in cases of extraordinary need (major family events, emergency situations, etc.), employees in the party apparatus might use the party's cars under the condition that they paid a cost price of Forint 1.50 per kilometer. They also emphasized that access to the party's cars was absolutely dependent on the party work to be done and that private use of cars could not and must not be seen by any functionaries within the apparatus as a benefit due to them.¹⁹ As it transpires from a speech of PGO's department chief Mrs. Pálné Laczkó, the abolition of the possibility of private use of cars as a due was one of several measures restricting or

taking away privileges²⁰ enjoyed by all (and/or by some) members of the party apparatus during the Rákosi era. Significantly, she asked for the apparatus' understanding with reference to the party's precarious position in post-1956 Hungarian society, and she almost explicitly promised to relax the restrictions upon the acquisitive lust of her fellow functionaries as soon as the general economic, political, and social situation in the country would have improved enough, to the extent that people would become less attentive and sensitive toward the privileges of the apparatus.²¹

Even though Mrs. Laczkó's (and the higher party leaders') understanding of "socialist legality" was rather pragmatic, it seems, the heirs to professional revolutionaries did not regard living modestly, even in the short term, agreeable. As Mrs. Laczkó herself noted in another section of her speech, "Some members of the apparatus frequently use [the available means of transport] as their private property, i.e., they regularly travel with them even when not on official trips."²² At a meeting of her own department half a year later, she explained what complicated her department's efforts to impose greater modesty on the apparatus class: "It has been raised that we should be more modest. When it comes to providing the leaders, [however], no modesty is in sight."²³ A short year later, in front of the national meeting of the economic chiefs of the county committees,

She raised it as a sensitive issue and listed several particularly bad examples with regard to car use. She told, for example, that in Bács County, [members of the apparatus] had no access to cars for many work-related purposes, while cars were readily available for the county secretary, the 2nd secretary, and the department chiefs when these decided to go hunting. All of them went off [with their cars] under the pretext of some job to be done and then they all met at one and the same place [for hunting]. The situation is not better in Miskolc [Borsod County] either. We were given to understand that comrade Benyák [chief of the county committee's economic department] had become mentally exhausted and, suddenly, he became a bad department chief, and the same applied to his referent of cars management. When we looked at what was behind all this, it turned out that [Benyák] had been daring enough to file a report about the county [committee's] functionaries having drinking parties together with the chauffeurs. That's why they had to be sacked. . . . *Party employees should know that while there is mileage to be used for party work, there is none for having fun and hunting.*²⁴

Mrs. Laczkó encouraged the county department chiefs to stand up against the "county secretary comrades" and tell them "[they are entitled to] a mileage for private car use, but [it is limited to] 500 kilometers a month, and it can only be used within the limits defined by the maximum monthly workload [310 hours – G.P.] of the chauffeurs." She then lashed

out against those (county secretaries) who used 1,500 kilometers monthly for their private needs, covering up the illegitimate use by way of developing a log-rolling relationship with their chauffeurs.

In her intervention at the meeting, Mrs. Laczkó also referred to a mounting pressure on her department from functionaries who wished to use the party's cars to learn to drive—she was particularly irritated by the fact that even economic chiefs of county committees approached the PGO with such wishes on their own behalf: “nowadays everybody wants to learn to drive, using the party's cars and gasoline. You should forget about this, we will never permit this, and [we won't allow this] particularly for economic department chiefs – [for, if we yielded to them] how are they supposed to resist such demands from the rest of the apparatus [?].”²⁵ At the same meeting, several counties' economic chiefs responded enthusiastically to Mrs. Laczkó's comments and rushed to add their own local experience. A comrade Rusznák of the Békés county committee emphasized,

... he welcomes [central] control of car use. They have problems like those of other counties. Department chiefs [of the county committee] insist on having their own cars [i.e., that they should exclusively dispose of a party car, without having to share it with others – G. P.]. The relationship between the political staff and the chauffeurs degenerates to the extent [that it becomes] dangerous. It is not only that the county secretary exclusively and freely possesses his car, but so does his family too. A warning should be issued about this by the higher leadership. There is hunting going on not only in Bács [County], but also in their [county].²⁶

In her “Report on the status and use of means of transportation at the county and district party committees” from October 6, 1958, PGO chief Mrs. Laczkó summarized the experience of PGO controls carried out in the provinces and told this about the pervasive tendencies of sneaking privatization:

Members of the county and district party committee apparatuses can, in justified cases and against proper payment, use the cars of the party committees [for private purposes]. The assessment of whether such wishes are justified is not always satisfactory. Moreover, party employees often take advantage of the cars, even though they have no permission, and they don't pay for the use of the cars. *This kind of use springs simply out of an irresponsible love of comfort and the seeking of individual material advantage.* According to our experience, in the cases of this kind of private use, it is not only the party employees but also their relatives and other people not employed by the party that exploit the cars. According to our inspection of waybills of the cars belonging to Bács-Kiskun county's county and district party committees, since last December, they have used more than 5000 kilometers for private purposes.²⁷

The PGO report is yet another instance where the unholy alliance between party employees and chauffeurs manifest in “joint drinking parties, the use of cars for private purposes, and breaches against traffic rules” is mentioned and criticized.

To be fair, the phenomena of sneaking privatization were far from confined to the provincial party apparatus. At a meeting arranged for the Budapest district PGO leaders in July 1959, the representative of the PGO of the central committee quoted a couple of frightening examples for the use and abuse of the party’s cars: “A car belonging to a [Budapest] district’s [party committee] spent two weeks in Földvár [at the Lake Balaton] while the comrade secretary [of the MSZMP’s district committee] was having his holidays there. The car of another district was parking [for hours] outside a hairdresser’s shop, while the comrade secretary’s wife was waiting for and got taken care of by the hairdresser.”²⁸

As early as mid-1958, the tendencies toward privatization of mobility offered by party cars had become manifest in excess expenditure transgressing the limits set in the MSZMP’s annual budget. A report from September 1958 noted that in 16 out of the 18 counties the limits of expenditure on cars stipulated in the annual budget had been exceeded. Trying to explain this, the PGO complained not only about the uneconomic, uncoordinated use of cars but also about the “encroaching [practices of] illegitimate private use of cars,” without the users’ paying for the costs. They were also emphatic about the possibility of eliminating the excess spending by “frugal economic management and by bringing an end to private traveling [with the party’s cars].”²⁹

The most common way of appropriating the party cars for private needs seems to have been the manipulation with waybills following each party car and set up for each trip made by the car. These documents were expected to clearly state the point and time of departure, the route, and target station/arrival time of each trip; to identify all passengers by name; to reveal the exact distance covered; and to carry other official notices (e.g., permissions if required for the trip) that legitimize the use of the car. Meant to make chauffeurs as well as the “party workers” traveling accountable for their use of party cars, the waybill was an easy prey to a broad scale of manipulations—from simply skipping the setting up of a waybill for a trip to confirmation granted by a party boss to cover up the chauffeur’s private detours in exchange for the latter’s willingness to set up a waybill about an official trip, while it actually served the boss’s and his family’s private needs.

In 1961, the PGO carried out a systematic scrutiny of the waybills produced in the first 10 months of the year by the central committee apparatus—that is, about the car use by the employees of the various departments of MSZMP’s central committee in Budapest. They found

three “problematic” categories of waybills: (a) the ones that provided less than enough detail to be able to ascertain about the actual target and/or objective of the trip; (b) waybills which provided enough detail so as to surmise (but not enough to prove) that the trips, although they claimed to have had an official errand, were made for private purposes; and (c) waybills where “private use” had been explicitly mentioned, yet in the accountancy, the trips were not “drawn” from the legitimate private mileage available for the functionary in question. The report includes a list of 31 functionaries and their trips falling into these categories of dubious character and amounting altogether to 25,656 kilometers. During the same 10 month period, the *legitimate* private use of cars amounted to mere 3,245 kilometers in the central committee apparatus as a whole.³⁰ Another memo of the PGO concerning the use of cars at the central committee and its various organs added to all this that it had been impossible to control the proper use of even the legitimate mileage at disposal for private purposes (6,000 and 3,000 kilometers per annum in the case of central committee department chiefs and their deputies, respectively). The reason was that “the comrades fail to indicate “private use” on the waybill, and one can only infer from the timing and indicated objective of the trip [that it served private purposes]. The comrades don’t use the ‘B’-type monthly waybill [which should be the appropriate document for such trips – G.P.].”³¹ The author of a report from an 1967 inspection of the central party garage (the Transportation and Technological Company, as it was called after 1956) stressed how hard it was to draw the line, on the basis of waybills, between legitimate and illegitimate car use—yet, his description of what he found made it obvious that he too had to do with phenomena of sneaking privatization:

The waybills don’t always make it possible to see . . . whether the car use had been legitimate. [However], when the [biweekly] shifts of holidaymakers take place [in the summer months] at the Balaton Lake, some 70-100 party cars converge on the major holiday resorts. Personal use and official trips mingle. Most of the workplaces do not make records of the actual use of personal mileages.³²

In other words, “the comrades” tended to use pre-printed waybills normally in use for official, work-related trips and not for trips that should be made at the cost of their private mileage. Thus, seeming “modesty” when it came to exploiting formal entitlements to private mileages (applying only to CC deputy department chiefs, county first secretaries, and above), went hand in hand with extravagance when it came to making private trips under official pretexts.

From the systematic study of the PGO documents, it is quite clear that the tendency of private appropriation of automobility by members of the

apparatus was present throughout the period this chapter covers (1957–1981). I have found 120 documents either citing/describing (often several) individual cases and/or summarizing the experience gained during inspections over a period and/or in a certain group of national, county, and district MSZMP organizations. Observations of improper administration (by drivers and passengers) of waybills persisted throughout,³³ and there are good reasons to believe that “suspicious waybills” could hardly indicate more than the top of the iceberg when it comes to the actual dimensions of the sneaking privatization of automobility. Symbiotic relationship between party bosses and chauffeurs,³⁴ careful “coordination” of official trips with private needs, among others, were effective means to cover up what was going on. “Scratching-one-another’s-back” kind of relationship between chauffeurs and party bosses must have been a serious problem throughout the apparatus. In April 1960, the chairman of KEB (at the time it was called *Központi Revíziós Bizottság*), Gyula Fodor wrote a letter to Central Committee Secretary Jenő Fock summarizing KEB’s findings from a recent review of accidents where the party’s cars were involved:

We have established that [in 1959] the number of accidents, collisions in traffic caused by the party’s cars remained under the national average. Yet, several accidents occurred because of drinking and lack of discipline. We have also established that there have been cases in which the relevant authorities of the Ministry of Interior exhibited excessive lenience towards the chauffeurs of the party. In this even some party functionaries are faulty as they intervene with the organs of the Ministry of Interior on behalf of their chauffeurs who caused the accidents.³⁵

The party’s internal economic management had a veritable problem: on the one hand, the attachment and loyalty of the apparatus class to their party was certainly affected by the accessibility of various perks, material privileges, and advantages their status brought to them. On the other hand, many of these privileges and advantages were secured at substantial financial (and moral) costs for the party and the proliferation among the apparatus of semi-legitimate or entirely illegitimate practices in resource use constituted a leakage in the party budget threatening their economic stability (and could also undermine the legitimacy of the party’s power). The costs of securing the apparatus’ automobility (their transport by car) tended to figure among the two-three highest single items of expenditures. In 1968, 25.7 million Forints (Fts) were spent on car costs in the whole apparatus of MSZMP—more than 18% of the party’s total expenditure.³⁶ In 1971, the apparatus operated 873 personal cars with a value of 76 million Fts and with total costs absorbed by the infrastructure related to automobility amounting to more than Fts 85 million (including investments—among other things purchase of new cars—in that year). In

the same year, the legitimate entitlements to private mileage at the apparatus' disposal amounted to 396,000 kilometers.³⁷ For the same year, the "multiplier" for the costs of automobility was 5.75 Fts/km³⁸—in other words, the total value of the mileage entitlements formally granted by the party to its higher level functionaries was 2,277,000 Fts. The total of current operating costs of personal cars for the whole party apparatus was 13 million Fts in 1972.³⁹ Therefore, the formally sanctioned entitlements to private car use can be estimated to have amounted to as much as about 18% of the total personal car costs annually. If we now assume that the extent of irregular use of party cars for private purposes reached at least the level of the total of regular entitlements for private use,⁴⁰ we will understand the feeling of urgency with which the party's internal economic management and the higher party leadership tried to contain the sneaking privatization of automobility in the party apparatus and to put a stop to the growth of automobility-related costs in other ways too. Also, the costs of operating a large fleet of personal cars proved not merely high, but rather hard to control. For the year 1971, the gap between the planned and actual costs of the apparatus' automobility increased to an alarming extent (see table 6.1).

Table 6.1. Mileage Performed and the Costs of the Party Cars (1971)

	<i>Mileage Kilometers</i>	<i>Unit cost Forints/km</i>	<i>Total cost Forints</i>	<i>Growth from Previous Year</i>
Planned	2,200,000	4.92	10,830,000	—
Actual	2,563,146	5.56	14,250,190	141.3%
Actual/Planned (%)	116.5	113.0	131.6	—

Source: Gyula Farkas, PGO, "The implementation of the 1971 Budget of the Central Committee," March 27, 1972, MOL 288. f. 37/1971. 2. öe., fols. 30 and 50.

Therefore, the ambition to contain sneaking privatization went hand in hand with the desire to tame and establish control over the dynamics of mobility costs.

The early efforts to discipline the apparatus class by merely denying them access to the party's cars for private use (one of the measures of the Kádárist "new sobriety") failed not only because the functionaries managed to assert their interest through sneaking privatization but also because the apparatus openly resisted those measures and did not shy away from prompting their top leaders to reconsider. A case in point is the letter by the PGO leader of the mighty Budapest Party Committee to Mrs. Laczkó, the head of the Central Committee PGO from 1960, in which Budapest in fact asks the party's national leaders to abandon the restrictive policies of 1956–1957:

Recently, the secretaries of the [Budapest] district committees have been approaching us with increasing frequency asking for permission to use the car for personal purposes. (They often mention that all functionaries working in economic positions and in the state apparatus, to whose work personal cars are assigned have the right to use the cars for private purposes.) Today in Budapest we are only permitted to grant personal car use for the first secretaries of the district committees and for heads of departments in the Budapest party committee on the occasion when they take out their annual paid leave. . . . We suggest the solution that the first secretaries of the district committees and the Budapest heads of departments are granted by the Central Committee annually 2000 kilometers for personal car use from 1961 and on, and 1000 kilometers for the rest of 1960. The secretaries of the Budapest Party Committee concur with our suggestion.⁴¹

CONTAINMENT BY YIELDING: LEGITIMATE PRIVATE APPROPRIATION FROM BONUS IN KIND TO SALARY IN CASH

One of the reactions from the regulators was to try and contain the tendency we have discussed above by way of yielding and, at the same time, setting limits to it. It was only for a very short period when the policy of “new sobriety” led to the cessation of legitimate entitlements (first of all in the higher echelons of the apparatus) to use the party cars for private purposes. Indeed, the regulations suggested by Mrs. Laczkó’s department in July 1957 made no secret of the prevalent understanding according to which over and above a certain level of hierarchy in the apparatus, the private use of cars should be an entitlement rather than an illegitimate practice. These rules, modifying the resolution of the Organizing Committee of the MSZMP from February 20, 1957,⁴² distinguished between three categories of cars:⁴³ (a) allowance (*járandósági*) cars; (b) personal use (*személyi használatú*) cars; and (c) official (*szolgálati*) cars. The last category constituted the great majority of the party cars, to be used exclusively for official trips by the great majority of rank-and-file apparatus members with no special privileges to use the cars for private purposes. “Allowance cars” were tied to the top of the apparatus elite: members and candidate members of the political bureau, central committee secretaries, and the first secretary of the Budapest party committee. They each had a car (and a reserve car) at their disposal with a chauffeur and unlimited mileage for private use—the car and the driver were at their disposal day and night, including the weekends. “Personal use” was the entitlement of the chiefs of the central committee departments, the secretaries of the Budapest Party Committee, the first secretary of the Communist Youth Association, the head of the editorial board of the party daily, *Népszabadság*,

and the first secretaries of the county party committees. Those entitled to personal use could use the party car for private purposes up to the limit of 6,000 kilometers per annum—deputy chiefs of the central committee's departments had personal use of up to 3,000 kilometers.

The above hierarchy reflects the various levels of power within the party-state apparatus. This hierarchy was manifest also in terms of the car's quality (the car brands) put at the disposal of the functionaries. Western brands, like Chevrolet and/or Mercedes, signaled a high level within the *nomenklatura*. Indeed, a Chevrolet Bel Air (or Impala) as well as the Mercedes (whether 220 or 280) unequivocally signaled that the person it served was ranking rather high within the *nomenklatura*. After a short period of experimentation with the Soviet "representative car" the Chaika in the first half of the 1960s, Hungary's ruling class settled with Mercedes for its high echelons and with Volga, Polski Fiat, and Zhiguli/Lada for the lower ranking groups. The steadily increasing number of cars imported from Mercedes-Benz in the Federal Republic, especially after 1964–1965 heralded, among other developments, the end of "new sobriety" policies, and particularly the wide range of Mercedes models available made it possible to finetune the expressivity of the car in relation to the status of the functionary it served (see figure 6.1). This explains the increasing diversity of models of Mercedes cars exported from the Federal Republic



Figure 6.1. The Look of an "Allowance Car". Mercedes, the favorite car of the top *nomenklatura* in János Kádár's Hungary. Note: The photo was taken in 1962, in Budapest's II district, at Ezredes and Forint Streets. This was Mercedes' full-size luxury car of the W111-generation, probably a 230S, in the early 1960s. The one "A" letter registry plate makes it clear that this car served as an "allowance car" for someone of the rank of at least a minister (member of government) or a secretary of the MSZMP central committee. Lower level members of the apparatus class were served by cars of the party-state running with two letter registry plates (always starting with either A or B, like AB or BA and followed by four digits). It was not usual to be served by a Mercedes under the rank of deputy minister. *Source:* FortePan/Jezsuita Levéltár, photo nr. 209506.

of Germany to Hungary after 1965 (see table 6.2). Overall, our statistical data bears witness to the substantial effort state-socialist Hungary made to please its ruling class and cater to their preferences during the 1960s and 1970s. While the *annual average* number of imported personal cars of the brand Mercedes was less than three in the decade from 1954–1963, it jumped to more than 60 between 1964–1968, then doubled to 123 from 1969 to 1973, and remained firmly over 113 throughout the decade 1971–1980.

In 1964, the entitlements to “allowance” or “personal use car” were complemented with the right for the beneficiaries of the “personal use” cars to make trips abroad, at the expense of their mileage. Approximately 160–180 high status members of the apparatus were affected by this measure. For the chairmen of the central control committee, the central committee of revision, the department chiefs of the central committee apparatus, the directors of the Party Higher School and the Institute of Party History, the chief editors of the party monthlies *Social Review* (*Társadalmi Szemle*) and *Party Life* (*Pártélet*), for the secretaries of the Budapest Party Committee, for the first secretaries of the county committees, and for the first secretary of the central committee of the Communist Youth Organization the extension of their entitlement included disposal over the car together with a chauffeur. For the lower level apparatus members still having entitlements with limited mileage (3,000 kilometers) for private use, foreign travel was now permitted upon the condition that they had driver’s licenses and drove the cars themselves⁴⁴

The economic significance of the “personal use” entitlements for the party budget as well as for the beneficiaries themselves is clearly shown by a statistical compilation summarizing “above-the-salary social benefits” in the central committee apparatus for 1964.⁴⁵ Among all these benefits, the cost of “personal use” cars was the third largest item (after subventions paid to kindergartens and holidays): they amounted to 513,000 out of a total of Fts 2,478.000 million (over 20%). As a share of the total automobility-related costs of the central committee apparatus for 1964,⁴⁶ the costs of personal use were slightly above 7%. Seen from the beneficiaries’ point of view, “personal use” cars constituted the second most important benefit in terms of annual cost-value per recipient—subvention of kindergartens added 33,526 Fts per capita to the private economy of the recipients; “personal use” cars put on the average 12,214 Fts into each beneficiary’s pockets (the approximate equivalent of their salary for two or three months), the third largest item being the bonuses paid on major anniversaries (like, e.g., April 4, the anniversary of Liberation, or November 7 of the 1917 Russian Revolution), at an average of 3,778 Fts per recipient. Beneficiaries of the subventions by the party toward its functionaries’ costs of holidays in party’s facilities received 1,786 Fts.

Table 6.2. Cars Exported by Mercedes-Benz to Hungary, 1954–1980

<i>Models Exported:</i>	450	350	300	280	250	240	230	220S or 220SE	Other Models	Together	Value in West-German Marks
1954–1963			10					118	145	273	
1964–1968			9	4	32		108	46	104	303	
1969–1973	3	18	10	146	96	4	122	68	148	615	
Total for 1954–1970			21	43	88		185	192	349	878	9,984,000
Total for 1971–1980	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	1132	23,658,400
Total for 1954–1980										2010	33,642,400

Source: The author thanks are due to the Daimler AG, Mercedes Car Group, Brand Communications, Classic Corporate Archives, Stuttgart, Germany, for making the data accessible via Mr. Wolfgang Rabus' email communication to the author on February 19, 2008. Value data in the early period is only available for 1954–1956 (this is added to the total for 1954–1980). From 1974 and on, only the total number of cars is available without a breakdown to the various models.

Surging costs of a sizeable fleet of personal cars owned and operated by the party-state had forced the country's top political leadership, by the late 1960s, early 1970s, to assess the situation comprehensively and re-regulate. In accordance with the political bureau resolution of March 7, 1972, the council of ministers swiftly acted and introduced Government Decree nr. 14/1972/IV. 22/Korm. sz. to become effective from July 1, 1972.⁴⁷ The objectives with the decree were (a) to re-regulate (actually: to restrict) the personal use of cars in public ownership; (b) to contain the growth of (and even to reduce) the number of such cars; (c) to secure a more efficient use of cars and chauffeurs employed in the public sector; and (d) to secure and encourage the use of private cars in the service of the state. When it comes to the first point, the decree established three categories of legitimate private use of public cars. Under the chapter "Personal entitlements" it distinguished between "Allowance car," "Personal use car," and "Limited personal use car." The first category allowed unlimited mileage for private use to ministers (members of government), state secretaries⁴⁸ (and, of course, the prime minister and his deputies, as well as the highest dignitaries of the People's Republic, such as the president of the presidential council, the president of the parliament, etc.). "Personal use" granted a mileage of 10,000 kilometers for private use to deputy ministers, chairmen of the county (and Budapest), councils. "Limited personal use" was itself a composite category consisting in various categories separating different degrees of generosity in terms of mileage allowance: the top category (ministerial main department chiefs, vice presidents of non-ministerial national authorities) got 6,000 kilometers and the right to be shuttled between home and work; then there was a lower category with 3,000 kilometers annual mileage for private use, but no right to daily transport between home and work. The decree's intention was to achieve economies both by way of reducing the circle of people with entitlements and by way of encouraging those who were (and remained to be) entitled to relinquish their rights in exchange for handsome annual redemptions. There is an instructive compilation as to the economies achieved in the first year following the government decree in the "limited personal use" category (see table 6.3 below). The number of beneficiaries of "personal use" entitlement was reduced by 306 persons. The total mileage offered by the socialist state to its high-ranking officials was reduced by exactly one-third (33.3%), or by 875,000 kilometers in absolute terms. Significantly, however, only less than 17% of this reduction was made the "hard way"—without paying redemption to those losing their entitlements; 83% of these economies were achieved by the state by way of paying considerable sums of redemption.

The MSZMP followed suit and the secretariat of the central committee adopted a resolution on July 7, 1972 by and large on the model of the

Table 6.3. The Impact of State Authorities of New Regulations of "Limited Personal Use" and Daily Shuttle between Home and Work (July 1, 1972 – July 1, 1973)

	Before 1 July 1971		Reduction Due to Decree's Restrictions		Reduction Due to Entitlements Relinquished for Cash Redemption	
	Number of Beneficiaries	Mileage ('000 kms)	Number of Beneficiaries	Mileage ('000 kms)	Number of Beneficiaries	Mileage ('000 kms)
Personal Use	789	2,629	101	147	205	728
Shuttle	2,933	-	1,370	-	577	-

Source: Data from Attachment nr. 2 to "Összefoglaló jelentés a közületi személygépkocsi állomány alakulásának és rendelkezésszerű használatának ellenőrzéséről" ("Summary report on the control carried out over the development and proper use of the stock of public cars"), dated Budapest, September 15, 1976, produced by the Central Commission of People's Control (Központi Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottság – KNEB, the country's top national auditing authority), and signed by State Secretary Gyula Dabronák, the president of KNEB. *MOL* XVII-2-a-13. t. - 424. tsz. - a - 1976, box nr. 210.

government decree.⁴⁹ Similarly to the government decree, the resolution modified the previous regime of entitlements to personal use. The CC Secretariat hoped thus to be able to reduce the total mileage made available for personal use from 396,000 to 312,000 kilometers. Issues pertinent to the car use of the party's top leaders such as the members of the political bureau and the central committee secretaries (all entitled, of course, to so-called allowance cars) were not discussed in the resolution.⁵⁰ Personal use cars with free private mileage were the entitlement of the chairman of the central control committee, the department chiefs of the central committee apparatus, the first secretaries of the county party organizations and the Communist Youth Organization, the chief editor of the party's daily, *Népszabadság*, the chief editor of the party's theoretical journal, *Társadalmi Szemle*, and the directors of the central party institutions (higher party school, party history institute, etc.). Limited personal use with a mileage of 6,000 kilometers and daily shuttle between home and workplace were granted to the secretary of the central control committee, the secretaries of the Budapest Party Committee, and to the chief editor of the party's journal, *Pártélet*. Personal use limited to a mileage of 4,000 kilometers and daily shuttle between home and workplace were granted to the deputy department chiefs of the central committee apparatus, the deputy chief editor of *Társadalmi Szemle*, and to the secretaries of party committees in the five largest provincial cities of "county status" (Szeged, Debrecen, Miskolc, Győr, Pécs). Beneficiaries of personal use limited to 3,000 kilometers per annum (without the right to daily shuttle between home and workplace) were the secretaries of county committees, deputy directors of central party institutions, secretaries of the Communist Youth Organization's central committee, and the chief secretary of the Pioneers Association. Daily shuttle between home and workplace was permitted to the first secretaries of Budapest's district committees, the department chiefs of the Budapest Party Committee, the secretaries of the central committee of the Communist Youth Organization (and their first secretary in Budapest), and to the chief secretary of the Pioneers.

Interestingly, the PGO were rather restrictive in their proposal both when defining the circle of those with entitlements for private use of cars and regarding the size of mileage granted. Contrariwise, the revisions imposed by the secretariat before elevating the proposal to resolution, were in effect toward increased generosity in granting entitlements in both respects. On the other hand, the PGO (and the central committee secretary supervising them) did not prove particularly restrictive either when it came to their practical policies implementing the resolution. Quite a few members of the apparatus were granted exceptions from under the newly introduced restrictions. Entitlements such as shuttle service between home and work was restored to them after the resolution

had taken it away; the resolution deprived party bosses in the districts and department chiefs in the Budapest Party Committee of their earlier rights to personal use (within a mileage of 3,000 kilometers), but the PGO increased the so-called "social mileage" available and accepted other private purposes than extraordinary family events (serious illness, death, etc.) as qualifying for the use of the party cars.⁵¹

Similarly to the beneficiaries among high-level state functionaries, even party functionaries with entitlements to private mileages and shuttling between home and work were offered the possibility to relinquish their dues in exchange for an annual cash redemption. In the first year following the resolution, this redemption was 2 Fts per kilometer. Until July 1, 1977, over five years, 59 out of 168 high-level functionaries relinquished their entitlements in exchange for cash redemption.⁵²

From the data available, it seems obvious that major economies could not be expected, and perhaps were not even really intended to be achieved through the new regulations concerning legitimate private use of party cars. For one thing, these entitlements mainly concerned a rather limited circle of party functionaries in the higher levels of the *nomenklatura*. In this respect, the new rules are of interest rather because they better highlight the true nature of both the legitimate and the illegitimate private appropriation of automobility with party cars. Particularly, the entitlement-into-cash conversion speaks clearly about party cars as means to serve the *needs for private mobility* of the apparatus elite rather than, or at least just as much as, the pressing mobility requirements of the work of "professional revolutionaries." This comes into an even sharper relief when we consider that the same apparatus elite which eagerly propelled the tendency of sneaking privatization and the career ambitions of which were fueled by dreams about the ever more generous privileges and entitlements (and the increasing quality and elegance of the party cars) made accessible to them as they advanced upward in the hierarchy, exhibited also a remarkable resistance against the PGO's and the top party leadership's efforts to impose a "taxi system" on their car use and, even more, to make them rely on collective transport when feasible.

WHO IS AFRAID OF CAR-SHARING?

Another policy aiming to contain sneaking privatization was to impose the so-called "taxi-system" on the apparatus' car use. The taxi system of car use was to directly confront some aspects of sneaking privatization, in that, to the extent it would be observed, it would have made it impossible for individual party bosses, and/or for various units of the party apparatus, to take cars into their exclusive possession. Cars and chauffeurs

were supposed to be pooled and to be managed and assigned various tasks by local PGO units in a rational manner (including coordinated car-sharing between members of the apparatus, flexible redistribution of cars between various parts of the apparatus in accordance with legitimate needs, etc.) to achieve optimal utilization of the resources of mobility in the service of party work.

The 1972 resolution of the MSZMP CC Secretariat was based on the proposal from the PGO. The proposal started out from a diagnosis stating that the party's 873 personal cars, and the work time of their chauffeurs, were utilized at an appallingly low level of efficiency. This in the PGO's view was basically because all too large number of the cars were operated in the exclusive service of particular persons and/or particular organizational units in the party, which can be seen, of course, as one side of the tendency of sneaking privatization. Party bosses were unwilling to relinquish their "right" to "their" car at any time and found the idea of having to share the car either by way of letting other members of the apparatus to use them when they did not need them or by way of having other comrades as co-passengers on their trips quite unattractive.⁵³ Therefore, one of the most central objectives the resolutions pursued was to secure a general breakthrough for the taxi system in which to operate the party's cars. Car-pooling and car-sharing in the central committee, in the counties' and cities' party committee apparatuses became major criteria for the inspections carried out by the PGO in the later years of the 1970s.

The PGO tried to assert the principle of car-pooling and car-sharing early on. A PGO report, summarizing country-wide experience gained from a series of controls, stated in October 1958 that

car use is not always according to rules and [is not always] coordinated. . . . At a number of county committees the cars are disposed of not by the economic departments, but by other departments. Therefore, trips are not properly coordinated between the various departments and often several cars would pop up [from the same county committee] at one and the same place. Although we instructed the [county] economic department chiefs to put an end to practices tying up cars with individual departments, this is still what prevails in some counties (like Somogy, Pest, Hajdu).⁵⁴

In a circular sent out to all party organizations in the country right after a national meeting for all economic department chiefs of the county and major city party committees (June 5, 1959), the PGO recapitulated what "several comrades said": the planned and efficient management of car use in their counties is still not secured "because the cars are disposed of [separately] by the different departments." They emphasized "We have already spelled out our view in this question: there can be no proper

economic management of the use of cars until the distribution of cars is not brought under central management."⁵⁵

The situation prevalent in this respect at the central committee apparatus was not better than in the provinces, on the contrary. The November 1960 report of the PGO on car use in the central committee was emphatic in claiming that the rather steep annual increases experienced in the total mileage performed by their cars was to some extent a result of the loose discipline in the apparatus:

It happens many times that more cars than necessary go to the same place. For example, on 3 March [comrades traveled] to Borsod County from the Cultural Department, the Industrial Department, and from the Central Control Committee [in separate cars each]; on 24 March, four cars went to Borsod: 2 cars from the PGO, one from the Central Control Committee, and one from the Agit-Prop. Department. In most of the cases—due to the variation of the tasks and because of the various kinds of investigation to be made in the territory of the county—coordination of these trips is complicated, but organized coordination could at least in part reduce the use of cars.⁵⁶

In December 1960, the secretariat of the central committee tried to deal with the problem in a resolution obliging the central committee apparatus to pool the cars at their disposal and to use the pool in a planned manner, through advance applications.⁵⁷ But lack of coordination, "exclusive rights" exercised over cars by local party bosses or by various departments proved to have been chronic problems criticized in PGO reports from inspections made in different county committee apparatuses throughout the 1960s and the 1970s. A report from Békés county (1960) noted that the distribution of cars was not a mandate of the economic department (as it should have been) but that the cars were disposed of by various departments separately. Hence, the problem that "district committees often receive visits by two cars from the county at the same time" and, if a department's car needs an overhaul, the functionaries of the department might prove unable to get to the districts for several days or weeks.⁵⁸ The same problem was observed in the case of the cars of the county, district and city organizations sorting under the party committee of Borsod county. In the report from Borsod, the officials of PGO also mentioned that the issue had on many previous occasions been taken up and discussed with the county secretary responsible for economic management, it had even been mentioned at a meeting of the executive committee of the county' party organization, to no avail.⁵⁹ An inspection in Pest county found generally satisfactory conditions, except for the Dabas district, where the "district secretary comrade has monopolized one of the cars for his own use."⁶⁰ PGO representatives scrutinizing the car use of the central committee apparatus of the Communist Youth Organization

bumped into a large number of irregularities, among them the recurring wasteful phenomenon of several cars going to the same places at the same time, telling about the lack of coordination and failure to exploit opportunities of car-sharing. Even in suspicious cases of (mis-)use of cars, they noticed the complete lack of car-sharing, planning, and coordination—like in the case of the heavy traffic, during the hottest summer months, to the Balaton Lake: “Almost at the same time and to the same localities, they drove with several cars. For example, 21 cars went to the Balaton region during July 1962, 19 in August 1962, and 24 in July 1961.”⁶¹ A PGO circular to all the department chiefs of the MSZMP central committee apparatus from 1965 reveals the persistence of the problem in the top layer of the apparatus. Dezső Lakatos, PGO chief, called for greater frugality in the use of the party’s resources emphasizing particularly, as the single largest item of current operative costs, the significance of greater economy, more organization, and coordination in the use of cars:

You should try and coordinate the trips within Budapest and to the provinces from the same department to avoid that several cars from the Central Committee appear at the same time in the same place. (In the course of the last year, on several occasions, comrades from the same [Central Committee] department visited the same place at the same time with 2 or even 3 cars.) . . . Please, help us to be able to fulfil the Central Committee resolution even with respect to the apparatus of the Central Committee.⁶²

The appeal seems to have failed to work—early 1965, the PGO announced “some measures of economy” to be carried out by the central committee apparatus, among them the decision that no more than one car can be earmarked for and can stand by at the disposal of each central committee department. This car should cater for all the needs of the department chief as well as for the needs of the rest of the department for trips within Budapest. All the other cars that had until then been earmarked for the departments were to get integrated in a pool sorting under central planning and coordination based on advance applications from the departments. In addition, the apparatus had to apply well in advance for all trips to the countryside to the PGO who would then secure proper coordination and car-sharing and arrange for the cars at the central party garage.⁶³ Two years later, an inspection carried out by the PGO at the Transportation and Technological Company (the name, after 1957, of the central party garage in Budapest), led to the conclusion that, although there had been a temporary reduction in the mileage used by the central committee during 2 years following the measures, in terms of *rational* use of cars (coordination, car-sharing, exclusion of illegitimate use of cars for private purposes, etc.), there had been no improvements whatsoever.⁶⁴

If resistance was strong in the center, it was even tougher in the provinces. The Békés county committee also received critical remarks from its inspectors, due to lack of coordination and, in general, uneconomic car use with conspicuously low average number (1.7) of passengers per trip.⁶⁵ Similar findings surfaced from the inspections made in Tolna (1964), Szabolcs (1965), Somogy (1966), Tolna (1967), Borsod (1966), Pest (1967), Győr (1968), Pest (1968), Bács (1974), Pest (1974), Csongrád (1975), Komárom (1975), Győr (1976), Baranya (1976), Fejér (1976), Veszprém (1976), Bács-Kiskun (1976), Pest (1976), Tolna (1977), Heves (1977), Zala (1977), Fejér (1977), Somogy (1978), and Szolnok county (1980).⁶⁶ In all these cases, the reports tell about a partial or complete failure to introduce and assert the “taxi-system,” one of the frequent explanations being that many party bosses (county or even district secretaries) refused to allow “their cars” to be included in the pool and/or the resistance on the part of county committee departments to attempts to “take away their cars” from them. As the summary report of PGO on the inspections in 1975 put it,

The county secretaries, the publishing houses of the county dailies, the city secretaries at the party committees in the county and district centers . . . continue to use the cars tying them to [their] persons or organizations. The integration of these cars into the taxi system is mostly formal. The rational coordination of personal transport is also complicated by the prevalent aversions towards car-sharing [az utastársítástól való idegenkedés].⁶⁷

A 1977 general review of the situation of automobility (*gépkocsiközlekedés*) in the apparatus also emphasized

The reasons of the shortcomings should mostly be found in the attitudes, in the not-too-convincing ways in which [people] relate [to these issues]. Even . . . the understanding [that] “it is my car” is haunting here. The consistent implementation of the resolution is decisively dependent upon how the number one [*első számú*] and leading comrades relate to this issue.⁶⁸

Despite the facts revealing a rather pervasive and lasting resistance against the taxi system, the PGO produced just as many reports about advances and successes achieved in this respect, particularly in the second half of the 1970s. These give probably a correct impression to the extent that during the second half of the 1970s, a large segment of the party cars in Budapest as well as in the counties had been successfully integrated in a collective system of central coordination and car-sharing. The reason for this can hardly have been the submission of the apparatus to the system of pooling and sharing—rather, it was the fact that by then the party cars had lost much of their significance as the means of automobility for members of the apparatus. Instead, a massive reliance on the private cars

owned by members of the apparatus had been evolving, particularly after the secretariat's resolution of 1972, in "solving the transport problems of the party," to which we will turn our attention soon.

WHO IS AFRAID OF COLLECTIVE TRANSPORT?

Nothing is more telling about the preferences and desires of the apparatus class in the world of modern mobility than their practices in relation to the means of public (collective) transport. Collective transport was a very important "front" for the PGO and the higher party authorities in their efforts to keep the costs of apparatus mobility within limits. Also, no other single policy of the PGO was as much of a failure as their series of attempts to persuade the central and provincial apparatus to rely on collective transport whenever possible and feasible.

As early as in 1958, the economic chief of the Budapest Party Committee, complaining about the lamentable situation in the districts (about the all too few and worn-out Skoda cars at their disposal), mentioned that "It is hard to get the comrades to accept to rely on other means of transportation too [not only cars]."⁶⁹ The Central Committee of Revision, in their report on the party's economic management in the first half of 1958, wished to call the attention to the opportunity for economies through using public transport instead of cars. They noticed that while the central committee apparatus used close to 2.5 million Fts on operating their cars during the first half of 1958, their spending on railways and buses was less than 20,000 Fts.⁷⁰ Their scrutiny of the waybills for July and August 1958 revealed that conspicuously large mileages were used for trips *within* the capital city of Budapest (they found cars making 200–300 kilometers a day never leaving the boundaries of the capital), where the apparatus had at their disposal the country's best local network of public transportation. The report on budget spending during the year of 1957 stated that a large part of the stipulated costs for transportation with other means than party cars (railways, buses, airplanes) had not been spent, and they called for restrictions when it comes to (the costs of) car use.⁷¹ Political employees of provincial party committees had often better reasons to insist on the use of cars,⁷² but even in this context what impressed the inspectors was "the rejection [*elzárkózás*] to use anything else (railways, bus), [but the cars]."⁷³ A report from the inspection of the central committee apparatus of the Communist Youth Organization in 1977–1978, urged the apparatus to reduce its use of highly expensive "*túra taxi*" (long distance taxi service), "all the more as for trips between Budapest and Miskolc and Budapest and Szeged, there are means of collective transport (fast trains) available."⁷⁴

Both in the national party budget and in the central committee's annual budget, the posts devoted to the use of collective transport regularly closed

the year with funds left over. The central committee apparatus used hardly more than one-third (30,700 Fts) of these funds in 1959 and less than a third (12,800 Fts) in the first half-year of 1960;⁷⁵ the car costs for the same apparatus in 1959 amounted to 6,676.000 Fts, which was to rise to 7,200.000 Fts in the year after.⁷⁶ In 1964, the central committee apparatus used 7,265.000 Fts to keep their cars running—at the same time, they used 82.000 Fts for collective means of distance transport (railways, bus, and air) and 43.000 Fts on local public transport (streetcars and bus) within the capital city of Budapest.⁷⁷ A statistical compilation from 1967 makes the structure of apparatus mobility visible through a longer period (see table 6.4).

In the budget plan for 1968, of 499 million Fts total expenditure, 25.4 million Fts were stipulated for car-related costs, as compared to the 2.6 million Fts planned for reimbursements for various other transport costs (within which the sum to be paid for collective transport was but a tiny fraction).⁷⁸ The central committee apparatus budget plan for 1969 stipulated for car costs at the level of 8,320.000 Fts, while the planned costs of using means of collective transport were altogether 30.000 Fts (0.36 % of car costs). Within the CC apparatus of somewhere between 300–350 employees (political as well as administrative and technical), altogether nine persons used monthly cards valid for Budapest Local Transport

Table 6.4. The Structure of Mobility in the HSWP Central Committee Apparatus, 1959–1967

Year	Number of Political Employees in the CC Apparatus	Car Mileage Used ('000 kms)	Calculated Cost of Car Use—at 2 Fts/km*** (('000 Fts) (A)	Collective Transport Costs**** ('000 Fts) (B)	B/A %
1959	205	2,535	5,070	221	4.4
1960	215	2,620	5,240	230	4.4
1961	206	2,566	5,132	211	4.1
1962	220	2,412	4,824	159	5.4
1963*	222	2,371	4,742	161	3.4
1964	235	2,394	4,788	124	2.6
1965	245	1,970	3,940	153	3.9
1966	230	2,098	5,196	127	2.4
1967**	220	929	1,858	51	2.7

*From October 1, 1963, the data do not include the car use of politburo members of approximately 250,000 kilometer per annum.

**1st half year only.

*** The "multiplier" of 2 Fts/km is relatively close to actual costs in the very beginning and all too modest for the last 2–3 years of the period covered. In 1965–1967, the actual costs were around 4 Fts/km.

**** Include distance travel as well as local trips within Budapest.

Source: "Összehasonlító kimutatás a Központi Bizottság apparátusának gépkocsi igénybevételéről ..." [Comparative statistics on the use of personal cars by the central committee apparatus ...], dated August 30, 1967, MOL 288. f. 37/1967, 4. öe., fol. 157.

(buses, streetcars, commuter trains).⁷⁹ The outline for the 1970 budget for the central committee continued to calculate with 30.000 Fts for reimbursements for use of public (collective) means of transport in local and distance traffic. At the same time, the prognosis for personal car costs amounted to 9,000.000 Fts, calculating with 2,200.000 kilometers of total mileage performed, at the average cost of 4.09 Fts/km.⁸⁰ The 1974 budget plan calculated with a total of 15 million Fts for personal car costs (almost 0.5 million Fts were planned to be used for reimbursements to be paid to members of the apparatus for using their own cars in work). 32.600 Fts were budgeted for costs of collective transport (0.22% of car costs).⁸¹ The 1979 budget plan stipulated for personal car costs to the magnitude of 22 million Fts, but less than 10.000 Fts for costs of public (collective) transport used by the apparatus (0.045% of the car costs).⁸²

Translating all these data into words, we can say that reliance on collective (public) transport was never a significant avenue for apparatus mobility, and that, in the course of the history of state socialism in Hungary, this alternative can be said to have literally withered away.

FROM THE FAILURE OF SHARING PUBLIC CARS TO THE SUCCESS OF SHARING PRIVATE COSTS

We have seen three policies deployed by the PGO and the highest party leadership in their attempts to contain the rising costs of automobility and to put a stop to sneaking privatization. None of these policies can be said to have achieved the desired effects. The tactics of “yielding and thus restricting” could work only to the extent that malpractices in way-bills management were rooted out, and proper accountancy of the use of entitlements (and related mileages) was secured. As in the case of many other good-willing norms and rules, even the “taxi system” could only be of as much worth as it could be properly enforced. Since, however, evasion of car-pooling and car-sharing could be done unpunished, this policy proved a poor deliverer too.

The most pathetic loser, however, was no doubt the policy of making the apparatus opt for public (collective) transport instead of using cars. Behind the singular failure of this policy, we find not only the rather open resistance of the apparatus class who so strongly preferred individual automobility over collective (time-table-dependent) transport but also the fourth important component of the 1972 resolution of the MSZMP Secretariat: the decision to welcome and encourage members of the apparatus to use their private cars in carrying out their work duties. As we will see, the material incentives attached to this policy were so attractive, the initiative appealed so powerfully to the private interests and profound

individualism of the members of the apparatus class that it practically swept all "competitors" off the table.

Chauffeurless Driving

Both a reduction of the number of chauffeurs employed in the party's service and, of course, the reduction of the number of party cars was seriously considered early on as ways of cutting costs. Indeed, these two moments were also targeted in separation from one another. The dismissive reactions of the late 1950s, shown earlier in this chapter, to applications from members of the apparatus to be allowed to learn to drive on and/or to drive themselves the party's cars were by the second half of the 1960s replaced by a cautious but increasingly permissive and, by the early 1970s, even an encouraging attitude. "Chauffeurless driving," that is, party cars driven by the functionaries themselves became an expanding phenomenon first in the central committee apparatus in the late 1960s. In 1971, 15% of the total mileage (2,563.146 kms) covered by the CC apparatus were made by the "party workers" themselves, without chauffeurs. The cost of a chauffeurless kilometer by the party car was 25% off the unit cost of a car with chauffeur.⁸³ The attainable economies were, of course, a powerful impetus for the party leadership to "export" what was initially a privilege of the *crème* of the apparatus class to the provinces. In a circular to all the economic chiefs of the MSZMP's county organizations, PGO department chief József Kozári gave green light to the county and district organizations to allow, from October 1, 1971 and on, the members of their apparatus to drive the party's cars on their official trips.⁸⁴ The 1972 resolution of the CC Secretariat confirmed this policy and emphasized that members of the party apparatus should be encouraged to drive in their work the party cars themselves.⁸⁵ Chauffeurless driving, however, never really managed to gather enough momentum to make any major "breakthrough." Part of the explanation was the resistance it met in some of the provincial party organizations.⁸⁶ Yet, in the light of the modest but promising results of the first "experimental" years,⁸⁷ the PGO (and, behind it, the party leadership) decided to promote this form of car use by two measures clearly calculated to appeal to the private individual interests of the members of the apparatus: (a) It was decided that functionaries driving the party's cars themselves should receive, as a mileage at their disposal for private purposes, 10% of the mileage performed by them on official trips without chauffeur. The last resolution of the central committee secretariat in this matter (February 4, 1980) raised the private mileage to be gained to 15% (maximum 1,000 kilometers annually) and offered, alternatively, the possibility of a direct cash payment to apparatus members undertaking to drive the party cars on official

missions. The payment offered was 0.50 Fts per kilometer.⁸⁸ (b) The PGO also offered to members of the apparatus to pay, upon successful final exams, 50% of their school fees of driver education courses. Particularly, this latter measure was said to have evoked an enthusiastic response on the part of the apparatus.⁸⁹ Until the mid-1970s, there had been a tangible growth in the total mileage performed in chauffeurless driving. This is in evidence in the data of the Transportation and Technological Company (the central party garage) which served the apparatuses affiliated with the central committee, the Capital City of Budapest's Party Committee, and the Pest County Party Committee (see table 6.5). It seems that the growth of "chauffeurless driving" in the apparatus, both in absolute and in relative terms, continued until 1976.⁹⁰ Thereafter, however, no more major advances were made in this respect, and the tendency leveled off somewhat. As a report, summarizing the experience of inspections made in the center as well as in the provinces in 1976, put it: "We witness year after year the growth of reliance, for official purposes, on private cars. The demand for cars without chauffeur [however] is losing its momentum [*mérséklődik*]."⁹¹

Indeed, what in 1972 appeared to have been a minor contribution to the total automobility of the apparatus (slightly more than 1.5 % of the total mileage performed in party cars), by 1976 had grown into a major component of the total mileage performed in the service of the party: private cars owned by members of the apparatus ran almost 7 million kilometers (around 75% of the total mileage performed by party cars), bringing the professional revolutionaries wherever they had to go in their official capacities. In 1976, there were "Nationwide, approximately 2000 comrades using regularly and/or in periods their own cars in taking care of their tasks."⁹²

Private Cars "in the Party's Service"

In their pursuance of lower costs through reducing the number of party cars and professional chauffeurs employed, the most successful policy measure ever taken by the PGO, and the high party leadership behind them, was undoubtedly the integration of private personal cars owned by members of the apparatus among the means of mobility.

An intense interest in apparatus circles to acquire private personal cars had been present from the early days of the Kádár era. In October 1958, the PGO's internal newsletter, *Ügyrendi Értesítő* carried a message to the economic departments of all county and district party committees, urging the latter to inform "comrades asking about how to buy a car" that "those party functionaries who would like to buy car should hereafter turn with their wishes directly to the Ministry of Postal Affairs and Transportation."⁹³ While this piece of news reveals earlier practices to the effect that

Table 6.5. Mileages Performed by Cars of the Central Party Garage and by Private Cars of the Apparatus ('000 kms)

	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976
Total mileage performed by party cars	10,224	10,195	10,464	9,656	9,464	n.d.	n.d.
Mileage performed by party cars driven by members of the apparatus	99	488	554	776	796	n.d.	1,250
Mileage of official trips performed by private cars of members of the apparatus	n.d.	n.d.	160	2,100	n.d.	4,961	6,951
Chauffeurless mileage (%-age of total)	0.97	4.79	5.29	8.03	8.41	n.d.	n.d.

Source: "Report on the Financial Inspection of the Transportation and Technological Company," PGO/131/12, April 21, 1975., MOL 288. f. 37/1975. 2. ôe., fol. 93. For mileage of private cars: MOL 288. f. 37/1977. 10. ôe., fols. 123-124 (1972 and 1976).

the apparatus assisted its members to acquire private cars, we should immediately add to this that the use of private cars by functionaries in their work was discouraged rather than encouraged in the early years. Confronted by numerous applications from the apparatus to be allowed to use (and get reimbursed for the use of) their own cars, the PGO's policy was, as a rule, to reject such applications. Nor were they ready to assist "the comrades to take driver's education by using party cars [or], in any form, by using the money of the party."⁹⁴

Both the pressure from the apparatus to get help in their efforts to get private cars (and to use them with reimbursements from their party) and the restrictive attitude on behalf of the PGO persisted into the 1960s. The March 1961 newsletter yet another time noted the increasing number of letters received from "party workers" in which they asked the PGO to help them acquire personal cars. "The writers of these letters are asking either to be excepted from having to queue for the car [normal mortals in Hungarian society had to wait for their cars, sometimes for years, after having fully paid for them] and/or to be granted credits towards the purchase of the car larger than what is allowed in the legal regulations of such transactions." The PGO urged economic leaders in lower level party organizations to tell "the comrades working in the apparatus not to contact the PGO when wishing to buy cars but to turn to the relevant commercial organizations and, in general, to keep themselves to the same rules as apply to citizens in general when it comes to buying cars."⁹⁵ The PGO was just as restrictive toward attempts at various provincial party committees to allow, sometimes even to actively organize "commercial activities" in servicing and repairing other institutions' "and/or private persons'" cars in the party garages.⁹⁶

The lust for cars in the apparatus made an important breakthrough in 1963, when a resolution of the central committee secretariat accepted "that comrades in the employment of the party may, in performing their duties, use as means of transport their own cars and [that] the party will pay reimbursement for such use."⁹⁷ Yet, no considerable expansion was experienced in the course of the 1960s in this respect, probably because of strong worries obtaining in higher party and government circles that the use of private cars in public service, in exchange for reimbursements out of public funds, might generate substantial additional incomes among the beneficiaries, which were considered either "illegitimate" and/or simply undesirable because of the inflationary pressure they might lead to.⁹⁸

Perhaps it doesn't come as a big surprise that the real boost, in the form of powerful arguments, for apparatus mobility with private cars came from the discourse of reform economics. At the core of reform economic thought was the idea that there was nothing that by necessity generated an antagonism between private-individual, group-, and (macro-)social

interests—indeed, reform-economists defined the very task of macroeconomic and social planning to create such an institutional and normative environment as would enable the socialist social order to harness (and not to oppress) all the energy and motivating force lying in individual interests toward the promotion of macro-objectives of general welfare. This was certainly the argument used to propose an “optimal combination of market and central planning,” the “new economic mechanism,” and similar arguments were used to promote an expansion in the use of private cars for public purposes through the incentives of various economic advantages to the car owners.

The central committee of revision of the MSZMP carried out an investigation in 1966 to explore the economy of the use of private cars, to begin with in the work of the various companies (printing houses, publishers, the central garage, etc.) attached to and owned by the party. The investigation covered the experience of a five-year period (1962–1966). It was conducted by László Gács (managing director of the country’s only savings bank and member of the CCR) and Márton Béres. The report was signed by László Gács, and its main conclusion was that

recourse to private cars for public purposes can bring about considerable economies for the people’s economy [i.e., at the macroeconomic level – G.P.]. In assessing this problem, we should start out from the economies attainable by the public use of private car for the people’s economy, rather than from the “profit” [*haszon*] brought with it for the car owner. Therefore, the reimbursement paid to the owner should be calibrated to make it lucrative for him, even though at a modest level. The objection that such permission [to use private cars for public purposes] might give rise to misuse is unfounded. Even though the possibility of misuse exists, this possibility of misuse might, in our opinion, cause much less damage than the misuse committed while using the state’s cars (*vide* illegitimate car use, theft of reserve parts and gasoline, etc.). If, however, the question is solved [by way of allowing the use of private cars for public purposes], such macroeconomic advantages might be derived from it as a reduction of the shortage of professional chauffeurs, of lorry drivers and competent personnel in car repairs and services.⁹⁹

Five years later, in their proposals to improve “the material [economic] appreciation and working conditions of the political employees in the party apparatus,” the PGO promoted both the idea of making it possible for apparatus members to drive the party’s cars and to grant favorable credit conditions as well as exemptions from having to queue for those functionaries who promise to use their new cars thus purchased for purposes of official work.¹⁰⁰ Before the 1972 resolution of the secretariat, however, the official use of private cars belonging to members of the apparatus had not reached any significant extent. We know, for example,

that in the central committee apparatus only four functionaries used their own cars occasionally in their work, with a mileage of altogether 1,438 kilometers over the whole year of 1971.¹⁰¹

The 1972 resolution on car use of the CC Secretariat opened for reliance on the apparatus' private cars in official work to a radically greater extent than had been possible ever before. It also provided a mighty new impetus toward acquisitions among apparatus circles of private cars by (a) rewarding higher level functionaries who relinquished their entitlements to use party cars for private purposes, offering support to them for their private car acquisitions (independently of whether or not they promised to use their cars then in their official work) and (b) by deciding to secure exemption from queuing and advantageous credit conditions for functionaries in general, provided they can drive and they undertake to use their private cars also for official purposes. The resolution gave priority to provincial (village and great village) salaried party secretaries and the political employees of district (*járási*) party committees and communist youth organizations.

The 1972 resolution triggered off a veritable avalanche of car acquisitions in the party apparatus nationwide. During the second half of 1972 and 1973, 1,080 cars were bought by members of the apparatus with the help of the PGO. The county committees reduced their stock of party cars by 62 cars (11 %).¹⁰² In the same period, the Budapest central party garage (Transportation and Technological Company) could rid themselves of 23 party cars, and even though the total mileage used in party work increased from 22.8 million kilometers (1972) to 23.5 million kilometers (1973), due to a radical growth in the contribution of private cars (increasing from a mere 130,000 kilometers to more than 2 million kilometers from 1972 to 1973), the total costs of automobility in the party apparatus remained at the 1972 level.¹⁰³ A report on developments in 1974 reveals that the PGO lent their help to the purchase of 1,134 private cars by the apparatus, while the reduction of the number of party cars in the county committees continued and reached 100 cars by the end of that year.¹⁰⁴ A memo on the "typical indicators of transportation in 1975" in the 18 counties noted not only that the mileage of official trips with private cars amounted to 4,961,400 kilometers and that this was the equivalent of 165 party cars average annual performance but also that "The initial aversions (toward the use of private cars) has become [a phenomenon of the] past, there are no more worries, and attitudes have taken a favorable turn."¹⁰⁵ The reports from the counties indicated a rapidly increasing "motorization" of the party apparatus, through the spread of private car ownership. The reports from 1972 and 1973 talk only about very few apparatus members owning and using private cars in service. Thereafter, however, the number of car owners, the number of functionaries taking driving

courses, and using their own cars in work grew at a spectacular tempo. In Veszprém county, 53 political functionaries used their private cars regularly for official trips. The county committee also excelled themselves in organizing the servicing and reparations of the private cars belonging to the apparatus in the committee's garage.¹⁰⁶ Even in Pest county there were 52 political employees at the party committee who regularly used their own cars for work-related purposes in 1973–1974. In 1975, the number of private cars used in official work increased to 56.¹⁰⁷ The 1974 report from Szabolcs county told about an increasing number of private cars used in the party's service (their total mileage in 1974 amounted to 206,000 kilometers), although it was also remarked that while several functionaries drove the party's cars themselves, quite a few of those who received substantial subventions to acquiring driver's licence, as well as the cars don't seem to wish to use their private cars in work. Reparations and servicing of private cars used in party work were also said to have been well organized in Szabolcs.¹⁰⁸ In Hajdu-Bihar county too, the number of new private cars acquired with the party's help (55 functionaries bought such cars in 1973) grew faster than the mileage done by private cars for the good of the party (mere 100,830 kilometers done by "42 comrades" in 1973, instead of the 235,000 kilometers budgeted and planned for).¹⁰⁹ From Somogy, the report brought better news: in 1973, 54 functionaries used regularly their own cars in work with a total mileage of 232,515 kilometers. Also, the county committee had organized the reparations and services for these private cars, by increasing the number of mechanics employed at the garage and introducing highly advantageous flat-rate contracts with low monthly payments for regular maintenance of private cars used in the party's service.¹¹⁰

Indeed, besides subsidized driver's education, exceptionally favorable credit conditions, and the possibility to purchase cars without having to wait in line for years (as all other citizens in the country had to), the availability of the party's infrastructure (garages, repair shops) that took care of and serviced their private cars at special (subsidized) prices substantially increased the propensity of the apparatus to acquire and use private cars in their party work.

By 1977, the results had been convincing: the party managed to reduce its stock of cars from 948 in 1972 to 740 by September 1977. While the mileage covered by party cars dropped by 30 %, the total mileage used for the purposes of official work shrunk only by 7.5 %, due to the enormous contribution of private cars used. "Today, in the country as a whole, 1800–1900 comrades use regularly or intermittently their own cars in doing their work," announced a proud PGO chief to the national meeting of economic chiefs in the party apparatus. They covered 6.2 million kilometers—the annual average performance of approximately 190–200

professional chauffeurs. The party leadership no longer had any doubts about their being on the right path and wished to continue the policy of encouraging the use of private cars in the party's service. They were determined to do so partly by repeating the annual car sale campaigns. In these campaigns, the PGO received from the Ministry of Domestic Trade a contingent of approximately 1,200 personal cars annually, which they then distributed among the applicants forwarded to them by the various county committees. This implied a short-cut access to cars for the apparatus, a considerable advantage over other mortal citizens who had to wait months or even years (depending on the demand for the model) from the point of time they fully paid for the car and the time they received it. The PGO also had special arrangements with the National Savings Bank for credits on exceptionally good terms (not accessible for the rest of the population) to the benefit of the apparatus. They carefully monitored price developments affecting the costs of owning and driving private cars and adjusted reimbursements accordingly to sustain the incentive and interest of the apparatus in using their own cars in work. Finally, they wished to promote the use of private cars in the party's service also "by measures taken to [organize] the ongoing servicing and repairs of the functionaries' cars by the repair shops, garages of the county party committees and of the Transportation and Technological Company [in Budapest]."¹¹¹

It is not possible with the available sparse data at hand to assess with any precision who benefitted economically most from the arrangements described above, the party or its apparatus? But it is probably not the most important question either. The higher party leadership was happy about the emerging new mix of party cars (with or without chauffeurs) and private cars as contributors to the total annual mileage deemed necessary to take care of the work of the apparatus throughout the country. In terms of cost development, increased contributions from private cars were encouraged and welcome because the reimbursements required to sustain the interests of the apparatus never came even close to the costs of running the party's own car fleet. On the contrary, the expansion of the use of private cars took place at the same time as the party leadership exercised renewed efforts to curb the total costs of apparatus mobility through restrictions imposed on the composition and use of the party cars. They tried to restrict and reduce the entitlements to private use; they tried to minimize the number of expensive Western models in the party's car fleet; and they never gave up the struggle against the persistent tendency of sneaking privatization. In these efforts as well as in their general desire to keep costs under control, they never missed an opportunity to point out for the apparatus all the personal-private advantages they were drawing from the symbiotic relationship with their party in the field of mobility. PGO chief László Karakas was not shy to announce loudly and

proudly the achievements of the new regime introduced in 1972 nor did he intend to hide his understanding of the mutual interests of the apparatus at large and the national party leadership in sustaining this regime:

The continuous and flexible implementation of the [1972] resolution further improves the transport situation of the apparatus at the same time as we can reduce the number of cars [owned by the party] and the personnel required for car transport. The possibility secured to buy the car outright, without having to wait in queue, and the favorable credit conditions granted for the apparatus bring with them substantial change in their living conditions too. We may safely claim that thanks to these measures an improvement in their living standards has been achieved. Scrutinizing the applications for cars sent to us, however, we have the impression that this is the only consideration that many applicants have in mind. Our task, however, is to grant direct access to car purchases and credit only on the condition that it leads to a reduction of the number of official cars.¹¹²

Indeed, what the new regime achieved was nothing less than that it at the same time, and at about the same total costs, managed to secure the car mileage required for party work and enabled the party apparatus to enjoy the fruits of individual-private mobility through the wholesale conversion of costs of party cars into costs of reimbursements for the use of private cars (as well as into costs of maintenance and services subsidized with public funds). Looking back at developments in the course of the short decade following the 1972 resolution, the PGO was correct in their claim that

Essentially, the apparatus's demand for mobility has by the integration of private cars been solved. . . . The efficient utilization of the work time of the political apparatus operating in the districts has been improved. Those traveling on assignments can use their time more flexibly and efficiently. *The imposed need to have to wait for one another has ceased to exist. Through the utilization of private cars even the leisure time of the functionaries has increased considerably.*¹¹³

As can be seen, what used to be a value-based as well as economically motivated policy objective (car-sharing) now appeared as an imposition belonging to an unpleasant past and the proliferation of private cars in the apparatus class as the dawn of freedom. The same report also noted that "[our] encouragement to use means of public transportation has been met by the resistance of the party employees." But this was no longer a serious concern of the party leadership. The new regime introduced in 1972 and re-confirmed in the secretariat's new, February 4, 1981 resolution, managed to strike an economically feasible balance between the irresistible desire among the apparatus class to enjoy all the physical and socio-cultural advantages that private automobility seemed to offer, on

the one hand, and the imperative felt by the higher party leadership to contain sneaking privatization, for the sake of budgetary stability, as well as for the sake of legitimacy.

Whether it manifested itself in the sneaking privatization of public cars, in the more or less enthusiastic responses to such measures as the introduction of “chauffeurless driving,” to the subsidies lent to taking driver’s education, the privileges granted, and/or subsidies and institutional support lent to the car acquisitions of the same apparatus, and, last but not just as importantly, to the large-scale reliance in the party’s work-related travel routines on private cars owned by members of the apparatus, we have seen the everyday practices of apparatus mobility as a major force propelling forward private/individual car-based mobility at the expense of both collective transports and collective forms of utilizing personal cars (car-sharing). By the end of the 1960s– early 1970s, few in the higher party-state leadership found it possible or indeed desirable to raise their voice (as Mrs Lackó did in 1958) against the “irresponsible love of comfort and the seeking of individual material advantage” manifest in those practices. Even fewer would have thought it appropriate to point out that walking more and using public transportation regularly (the only forms of mobility accessible to the great majority of Hungarian society) could have enabled the apparatus class to share at least part of the everyday of the same working people in whose name they ruled over the country (and made policy decisions affecting the infrastructure of collective forms of mobility). On second thought, though, the surge toward personal car-based mobility was not the least a flight exactly from sharing that experience.¹¹⁴

The social group whose everyday practices of mobility we have just discussed constituted the very core of the party-state apparatus class and politically the most powerful segment of the social elite. There is little reason to believe that a closer scrutiny of the state side of the political class of the party-state (the governmental apparatuses in the ministries and other national authorities) would have yielded greatly different findings. There were a series of reviews of the use of publicly owned personal cars carried out in 1976 by the Central People’s Control Commission (*Központi Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottság* [KNEB]), socialist Hungary’s authority of national audits, in a number of major governmental departments. They carried out comprehensive investigations in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries and in a large number of companies and cooperatives operating under the ministry’s supervision; in the Ministry of Light Industries; in the Ministry of Heavy Industries; and in the National Association of Small Industrial Cooperatives, OKISZ. Their reports confirm that personal car use and, in general, mobility in the state apparatus followed basically the same patterns and tendencies (including sneaking privatization) as found

in the case of the car use by party functionaries.¹¹⁵ We may also safely assume that the values, attitudes prevalent in the party-state's apparatus class, as they manifested themselves in their everyday life, did in fact impress the rest of society.

Commoners may have been profoundly suspicious when they were listening to political speeches or had to read various texts of agitation-and-propaganda, but they perceived the 'message' immediately when they saw the high level of "motorization" of the political class of the party-state both in terms of the large stock of public cars at their disposal and in terms of the conspicuously high density of private cars in their circles. They may have had doubts as to the legitimacy of their rulers, but they could without hesitation follow them when it came to their choices of the ways and style of everyday life, and they certainly subscribed to their understanding of what "good life" was like.

Few among the Hungarian population would have felt prompted to revolt against communist rule again if the Kádár regime had decided early on consistently to follow a policy of large-scale development efforts when it came to the infrastructure of collective transportation and a Khrushchevian style system of national car-sharing to cater for needs of individual mobility. It is hard to imagine that the chances of survival for state socialism would have been smaller if it had wished to distinguish itself by way of prioritizing and committing large resources to the development and maintenance of an up-to-date system of collective mobility or if state-socialist elites would have been content with meeting their own needs for mobility by relying on collective transport and car-sharing. The choices made by the party-state apparatus class for their own everyday life during the long 1960s are of monumental historical significance, in that they confirmed the inertia and inability of the state-socialist social order to emancipate modern social and economic development from "capitalist" patterns. It was in the everyday practices of elite mobility discussed above where the question whether state socialism could assert an alternative modernity in the field of mobility, a pattern distinct from (as well as an anti-thesis of) capitalist modernity, was decided. To use and expand Gyula Háy's witty formula when expressing his profound disappointment with Comrade Kucsera: Kucsera did not only forget the simple art of walking, but he had never been genuinely curious about the people and the world as it was experienced by pedestrians.

NOTES

1. Artúr Kiss, "A szocialista típusú fogyasztási mód és változásainak egyes kérdései (Elméleti módszertani vázlat)" [Selected issues related to the socialist-type

mode of consumption and its changes. A theoretical and methodological outline], *Tájékoztató. Filozófia, Politikai gazdaságtan, Tudományos szocializmus* (Newsletter. Philosophy, Political Economy, Scientific Socialism – periodical published by the Main Division [Főosztály] of Marxism-Leninism of the Ministry of Education) no. 4 (1973): 42–63.

2. From “Alternative Modernity? Everyday Practices of Elite Mobility in Communist Hungary, 1956–1980,” by György Péteri in *The Socialist Car: Automobility in the Eastern Bloc*, by Lewis H. Siegelbaum. Copyright © 2011 by Cornell University Press. Used by permission of the publisher.

3. Kiss, “A szocialista típusú,” 42. Kiss fails to properly identify his source. He refers to Gorz’s “essay titled “Socialism is a complicated business” (‘*A szocializmus nehéz dolog*’). Most probably, he used one of those “internal publications” produced for and made accessible exclusively to certain groups in the nomenklatura. These were translations into Hungarian of important Western (or Eastern dissidents’) books and writings distributed among a selection of members of the party-state apparatus, including the faculty of the communist party’s institutions of higher education and research. It could also have been the original (provided Kiss could read French), i.e., André Gorz’s critical assessment of Eastern European developments after Stalin: *Le Socialisme Difficile* (Editions du Seuil, 1967) published in English as *Socialism and Revolution* (London: Allen Lane Penguin Books Ltd., 1975).

4. Ibid.

5. Kiss, “A szocialista típusú,” 48.

6. The first part of Kiss’s formula is an almost verbatim citation of the “basic law of socialist economy” included in all textbooks of Marxist-Leninist political economy ever since Stalin’s last opus, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.* (Moscow, 1952), was published (see, particularly, Chapter 7).

7. For a discussion of the discursive strategies and the ‘master narrative’ of state socialism, see my essays: “Nylon Curtain: Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in The Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe,” *Slavonica* 10, no. 2 (2004): 113–123, and “The Occident Within or the Drive for Exceptionalism and Modernity,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 929–937.

8. Kiss, “A szocialista típusú,” 49.

9. Ibid., 49–50.

10. Cf. § 5. on p. 50 of Kiss, “A szocialista típusú.”

11. All documents of the PGO are held in the National Archives of Hungary, MOL 288. f. 37cs.

12. Sources of these data for 1955: József Bíró, Department of Party and Mass Organizations, central committee of the Hungarian Workers’ Party, “Information concerning the composition of salaried party functionaries (as of December 31, 1955,” dated May 5, 1956, MOL 276. f. 89/1956. 42. őe.; for the period between June 30, 1956 and December 31, 1963: MOL 288. f. 37/1964. 5. őe.; for December 31, 1965: MOL 288. f. 37/1965. 4. őe.; for 1981 and 1989: Ferenc Gazsó, “A kádərbürokrácia és az értelmiség” [Cadres bureaucracy and the intelligentsia], *Társadalmi Szemle* XLV, no. 11 (November 1990): 6.

13. Béla Kruzslák and József Czettl, members of the Central Committee of Revision (MSZMP Központi Revíziós Bizottsága), “Tájékoztató jelentés a

pártapparátusban 1959. év folyamán előfordult gépkocsi balesetekről” [Information concerning car accidents involving the party apparatus during 1959], April 20, 1960. MOL 288. f. 37/1960. 2. öe., fols. 299–300.

14. “Feljegyzés a párt és a KISZ gépkocsi helyzetéről” [Memo on the car situation of the party and the communist youth organization], attachment to PGO document nr. Pgo/716/2, MOL 288. f. 37/1965. 2. öe., fols. 64 ff.

15. Attachment to the proposal for the governmental decree nr. 14/1972. / IV. 22/ Korm. sz. of March 1972, presented to the council of ministers jointly by the Ministers of Finance, Transportation and Labor – part of the documentation included in “Összefoglaló jelentés a közületi személygépkocsi állomány alakulásának és rendeltetésszerű használatának ellenőrzéséről” (Summary report on the control carried out over the development and proper use of the stock of public cars”), dated Budapest, September 15, 1976, produced by the Central Commission of People’s Control (Központi Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottság – KNEB, the country’s top national auditing authority), and signed by Gyula Dabrónaki, the president of KNEB. MOL XVII-2-a-13. t. - 424. tsz - a - 1976, box nr. 210. An internal party document, the PGO’s suggestion to the secretariat to re-regulate car use in the party apparatus (June 26, 1972, Pgo/312/7), reveals that the actual number of cars in the possession of the MSZMP was 873: Protocol of the June 17, 1972 meeting the MSZMP Central Committee Secretariat, MOL 288. f. 7/1972. 407. öe., fol. 22.

16. MSZMP KB PGO, MOL 288. f. 37/1957. 2. öe., fol. 189.

17. The mobility of the apparatus in the provinces was assisted by a large stock of motorcycles and bicycles during about the first two decades of communist rule. They were mostly used by the salaried political employees (secretaries) of district and village (and so-called “great village”) party organizations. Problems pertinent to motorbikes and their use occur in the records with some frequency until the mid-1960s. Then they almost completely vanish, mainly because it became a policy on behalf of the PGO to rid the party of its motorbikes. Yet, I found a last report (from Szabolcs county), carrying information on the use of motorbikes, from as late as 1972. It tells about 28 great-village and village secretaries, 5 of whom used bikes and 14 motorbikes. The report, conveying the county committee’s plea for more cars, is dated December 11, 1972 – MOL 288. f. 37/1972. 8. öe., fol. 247. To the extent they were used in the provincial apparatus, the tendencies we will describe in this chapter with regard to cars (such as the ‘sneaking privatization’) applied to the motorbikes too – indeed, they asserted themselves even stronger in the case of motorbikes.

18. Minutes of the meeting held for pgo-leaders of the county party organizations, May 24, 1957, MOL 288. f. 37/1957. 1. öe., contribution by “Comrade Friedmann of Veszprém country,” fol. 80.

19. “Gépkocsi igénybevétele magáncélokra” (The use of cars for private needs), *Pártgazdasági és Ügykezelési Ügyrendi Értesítő. A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Központi Bizottsága Pártgazdasági- és Ügykezelési Osztályának Közleményei*, Budapest, no. 3 (May 1957): 8. The *Ügyrendi Értesítő* was an internal (confidential) information bulletin issued by the PGO to the benefit of the county and district organizations of the MSZMP. MOL 288. f. 37/1957. 2. öe., fol. 139.

20. Such as holidays free of charge at holiday resorts owned and maintained by the state; personal use of cars; the establishment and use of telephone lines in

the homes of functionaries free of charge; longer periods of paid holidays than what is prescribed in the country's labor legislation, etc.

21. Mrs. Pálné Laczkó, introductory speech to the national meeting of economic department leaders of the Budapest and county party committees, May 24, 1957 (copy sent over to Central Committee Secretary György Marosán, May 23, 1957) – *MOL* 288.f. 37/1957. 5. öe., fols. 28–29.

22. *Ibid.*, fol. 32.

23. Minutes of the PGO meeting of October 14, 1957. *MOL* 288. f. 37/1957. 1. öe., fols. 18–29.

24. Minutes of the September 8–9, 1958 meeting with the county economic department chiefs, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1958. 1. öe., fols. 17–18. Emphasis added – G. P.

25. *Ibid.*, fol. 18.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Mrs Pálné Laczkó, "Report on the status and use of means of transportation at the county and district party committees," October 6, 1958, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1958. 1. öe., fol. 186. We have reasons to believe that 5,000 kilometers was a minimum estimate of illegitimate car use, based only on waybills that were obviously manipulated.

28. Papers of the MSZMP Budapest Committee, BFL, XXXV (1) f. 21. öe., Minutes of the meeting held for the PGO leaders of the [Budapest] district party committees, July 29, 1959, 10, Comrade Ördögh from the PGO of the Central Committee.

29. PGO's report on "The Party's economic management during the first half year of 1958," dated September 30, 1958. *MOL* 288. f. 37/1958. 1. öe., fol. 255.

30. Mrs. Lombos, PGO, "Feljegyzés" (Memorandum), dated November 4, 1961, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1960. 6. öe., fols. 246–253.

31. PGO, "Memo concerning the car use in the party's C[entral] C[ommittee] and its organs and attached companies," n.d., *MOL* 288. f. 37/1960. 6. öe., fol. 245.

32. Ferenc Havas, PGO, "Memo on the findings of the thematic inspection at the Transportation and Technological Company [*Közlekedési és Műszaki Vállalat*]," Pgo/548/3, September 13, 1967, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1967. 4. öe., fol. 149.

33. See the reports on dubious practices with waybills prevalent in the following counties: Somogy (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1960. 6. öe., fol. 262.); Zala (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1960. 6. öe., fol. 259.); Hajdu-Bihar (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1960. 6. öe., fol. 263.); Bács (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1960. 6. öe., fol. 264.); Veszprém (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1961. 1. öe., fol. 221., particularly on the use of motorbikes); Tolna (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1962. 5. öe., fol. 263.); Nógrád (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1962. 6. öe., fol. 9.); Csongrád (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1962. 6. öe., fols. 65–66.); Békés (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1964. 7. öe., fol. 33.); Szabolcs (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1965. 6. öe., fol. 98.); Heves (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1965. 7. öe., fols. 58 ff.); Csongrád (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1965. 7. öe., fols. 123 ff.); Vas (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1965. 8. öe., fol. 79.); Baranya (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1966. 3. öe., fol. 125.); Hajdu-Bihar (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1966. 3. öe., fol. 152.); Somogy (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1966. 4. öe., fol. 32.); Borsod (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1966. 5. öe., fol. 12.); Nógrád (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1966. 5. öe., fol. 71.); Szolnok (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1966. 6. öe., fol. 344.); Pest (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1967. 3. öe., fol. 48.); Szabolcs (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1967. 4. öe., fol. 87.); Szabolcs (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1967. 4. öe., fol. 82.); Fejér (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1968. 3. öe., fol. 79.); Veszprém (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1968. 3. öe., fol. 229.); Pest (*MOL* 288. f. 37/1968. 5. öe., fol. 60.);

Fejér (MOL 288. f. 37/1972. 6. öe., fol. 166.); Csongrád (MOL 288. f. 37/1973. 4. öe., fol. 60.); Győr (MOL 288. f. 37/1974. 3. öe., fols. 214–215.); Baranya (MOL 288. f. 37/1976. 6. öe., fol. 92.); Csongrád (MOL 288. f. 37/1977. 3. öe., fol. 140.); (MOL 288. f. 37/1977. 3. öe., fol. 190.); Zala (MOL 288. f. 37/1977. 4. öe., fol. 70.); Békés (MOL 288. f. 37/1977. 6. öe., fol. 115.); Szolnok (MOL 288. f. 37/1980. 13. öe., fol. 84.). Documents commenting on malpractices regarding waybill administration prevalent in the country as a whole and/or in groups of counties: MOL 288. f. 37/1961. 2. öe., fol. 216.; in the Communist Youth Organization: MOL 288. f. 37/1963. 6. öe., fol. 98.); MOL 288. f. 37/1964. 1. öe., fol. 46.; MOL 288. f. 37/1967. 4. öe., fol. 149.; MOL 288. f. 37/1960. 6. öe., fol. 262.; MOL 288. f. 37/1973. 1. öe., fol. 107. On dubious practices of waybill administration in the case of the Central Committee apparatus, consult: MOL 288. f. 37/1960. 14. öe., fols. 57 ff. and fols. 96 ff.

34. “The relationship between county political leaders and chauffeurs is not always appropriate,” PGO chief Mrs Laczkó commented in 1958. “They would often spend hours together in revelries, but don’t have enough time for political work. In one case, 9 cars appeared at one place [in connection with a drinking party] from 11 districts.” (MOL 288. f. 37/1958. 1. öe., fol. 7.) For other comments on the ‘unprincipled’ [*elvtelen*] “logrolling” relationship between political employees of the party and chauffeurs: MOL 288. f. 37/1958. 1. öe., fol. 186.; MOL 288. f. 37/1959. 1. öe., fol. 22.; MOL 288. f. 37/1960. 14. öe., fol. 59.; MOL 288. f. 37/1967. 4. öe., fol. 143.

35. Letter by Gyula Fodor to Jenő Fock, April 20, 1960, 6/1/KRB/1960. sz., MOL 288. f. 37/1960 2. öe.

36. “Report to the Secretariat on the economic management during 1968 in party organizations, party institutions, and party companies,” Nr. Pgo/263/2., dated April 21, 1969, MOL 288. f. 37/1969. 1. öe., fols. 148 ff.

37. For the mileage officially granted for private use, see: Minutes of the Central Committee Secretariat’s meeting of July 17, 1972, MOL 288. f. 7/1972. 407. öe., fol. 23.

38. The source for the calculated unit cost of automobility (cost of using car to cover one kilometer) is Gyula Farkas, PGO, “The implementation of the 1970 budgetary plans for the Central Committee,” dated March 27, 1972, MOL 288. f. 37/1971. 2. öe., fol. 30.

39. Cf. National budget plan of the MSZMP for 1973, MOL 288. f. 37/1973. 2. öe., fol. 10.

40. Investigating their waybills, the PGO found in one county in 1958, that over a 10-month period the apparatus used, without entitlements or permissions, more than 5000 car-kilometers for private purposes (see footnote nr. 32). Assuming that this applied to all the 18 counties and Budapest and extending the hypothetical period to a whole year (12 months), we get close to 120,000 kilometers of irregular car use. But this was in 1958, when the apparatus was half as big as in 1971. Therefore, it is not implausible to believe that the extent of irregular car use can have been rather close to the total of the legitimate entitlements for private use in the early 1970s.

41. Dezső Lakatos, head of the PGO department of the MSZMP’s Budapest Committee to Comrade Mrs. Laczkó, head of the PGO Department of the MSZMP Central Committee, copy, August 5, 1960, Papers of the MSZMP Budapest Committee, BFL XXXV (1) f. 38. öe.

42. In May 1957 the “abolishment of [the availability of] cars for personal use” was still a fact of life – cf. Mrs. Pál Laczkó’s address to national meeting of economic chiefs of the Budapest and county committees, May 23, 1957, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1957. 5. öe., fol. 28.

43. “Report on the car situation of the party apparatus and suggestions for the modification of the Organizing Committee resolution of February 20, 1957, and for the maintenance and use of cars belonging to the Party and its institutions,” July 5, 1957. *MOL* 288. f. 37/1957. 1. öe., fols. 102–105.

44. Dezső Lakatos, PGO chief, “Proposal to the Secretariat for the use of personal mileages towards foreign trips,” Pgo/613, dated April 29, 1964, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1964. 3. öe., fols. 20–21. The arguments for the proposal referred to the fact (1) that the PGO had been approached by a number of first county secretaries and Budapest functionaries with the request for permission to drive abroad with their party cars, and (2) to the (as yet unregulated) practices in the state administration where, “on the basis of individual assessments, the minister comrades can give permission to use state-owned cars for private trips abroad.” I cannot say for sure whether the proposal became ‘law’, as I have not seen any document confirming this, but a rejection would quite certainly have left some traces in the PGO archives.

45. “A Központi Bizottságnál felmerülő bérrel felüli juttatások. 1964. évi adatok,” dated December 1, 1964, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1964. 5. öe., fol. 12.

46. Cf. PGO chief Dezső Lakatos, “A Pártgazdasági és Ügykezelési Osztály néhány takarékosági intézkedése a Központi Bizottság apparátusában” (Selected measures of economy by the PGO in the apparatus of the Central Committee – letter to the department chiefs and employees of the Central Committee apparatus), Pgo/232, dated February 26, 1965. *MOL* 288. f. 37/1965. 2. öe., fol. 26.

47. For documents concerning preparatory investigations, background, and even interdepartmental conflicts over the decree, see the papers of the Central Commission of People’s Control, *MOL* XVII-2-a 13. t.-424. tsz - a- 1976, box 210.

48. “State secretary” was a rank introduced in the second half of the 1960s for first ranking deputy ministers and leaders of non-ministerial national authorities, such as the presidents of the National Bank, the Central Office of Planning, National Office of Price, and Materials Management, etc.

49. For a complete set of documentation of this resolution, see “Minutes of the July 17, 1972 meeting of the MSZMP Central Committee Secretariat,” *MOL* 288. f. 7/1972. 407. öe. fols. 1–38.

50. Indeed, the economic and technical management of the cars belonging to top party and government officials had been taken care of, ever since the early 1960s, by the security services [*kormányőrség*] sorting under the Ministry of Interior, and not by the so-called ‘party garage’ supervised by the PGO.

51. József Kozári, department chief, PGO, “Jelentés a Titkárságnak a párt, a KISZ és a társadalmi szervek személygépkocsi-használata újrászabályozásáról szóló határozat végrehajtásáról,” Pgo/264/10, dated Budapest, May 22, 1973, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1973. 1. öe., fols. 106–107.

52. Minutes of the Central Committee Secretariat meeting of January 30, 1978, *MOL* 288 f. 7/1978. 541. öe., fol. 9.

53. This comes as a little surprise, after all, in the social study of personal car-based mobility one of the earliest insights was the strong appeal of the ease,

the lack of imposed socialization (“the freedom from others’ bad breath”) offered by the privacy of the personal car. As John Urry articulated it two and a half decades ago, “What is significant about the car is that it enables seamless journeys from home-away-home. And this is what the contemporary traveller expects. The seamlessness of the car journey makes other modes of travel seem inflexible and fragmented. So-called public transport rarely provides that kind of seamlessness (except for first class air travelers with a limousine service to and from the airport). There are many gaps between the various mechanised means of public transport: walking from one’s house to the bus stop, waiting at the bus stop, walking through the bus station to the train station, waiting on the station platform, getting off the train and waiting for a taxi, walking through a strange street to the office and so on until one returns home. Each of these gaps in a semi-public space is a source of inconvenience, danger, and uncertainty.” (John Urry, “Automobility, Car Culture and Weightless Travel: A Discussion Paper,” published by the Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, UK, <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Urry/Automobility.pdf>. Published originally in 1999, last revised December 6, 2003 (last accessed May 16, 2023).

54. Mrs Pálné Laczkó, head of PGO, “Jelentés a megyei-, járási pártbizottságok közlekedési eszközeinek állapotáról és használatáról” (Report on the status and use of means of transport at the county and district party committees,” dated October 6, 1958, MOL 288. f. 37/1958. 1. őe., fols. 184–185.

55. PGO, “Our response to the remarks and suggestions tabled at the national meeting for the economic department chiefs [of the county and major city party committees] of June 5, 1959,” dated June 20, 1959, MOL 288. f. 37/1959. 1. őe..

56. PGO, “Report on the car use in the apparatus of the Central Committee,” Pgo/1202/5, dated November 17, 1960, MOL 288. f. 37/1960. 14. őe., fols. 57–58.

57. The resolution is referred to in the Minutes of the national meeting of economic chiefs of county party organizations February 27–28, 1961. Pgo 429/3, MOL 288. f. 37/1961. 1. őe., fol. 26.

58. PGO, “Report on the party economic and administration work at the Party Committee of Békés County,” July 15, 1960, MOL 288. f. 37/1960. 3. őe. fol. 47.

59. Károly Ördögh, PGO, “Report on the inspection of party economic and administrative work in Borsod county,” Pgo/997/4, MOL 288. f. 37/1960. 3. őe., fol. 136.

60. Mrs Hugóné Mátrai, PGO, “Report on the inspection made at the Party Committee of Pest County ...,” Pgo/358/2, March 6, 1961, MOL 288. f. 37/1961. 4. őe., fol. 151.

61. PGO, “Summary report on the inspection of the economic work of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth Organization,” Pgo/1144/5, dated November 28, 1963, MOL 288. f. 37/1963. 6. őe., fol. 98–99.

62. Dezső Lakatos, chief of PGO, Circular, January 18, 1965, “Sent to the department chiefs of the Central Committee,” Pgo/1106/10, MOL 288. f. 37/1964. 3. őe., fols. 57–58.

63. Dezső Lakatos, PGO chief, “Some measures of economy, in the apparatus of the Central Committee, taken by the PGO,” Pgo/232, February 26, 1965, MOL 288. f. 37/1965. 2. őe., fols. 26–28.

64. Ferenc Havas, PGO, "Memo on the findings of the thematic inspection at the Transportation and Technological Company [*Közlekedési és Műszaki Vállalat*]," Pgo/548/3, September 13, 1967, MOL 288. f. 37/1967. 4. öe., fols. 145–146.

65. PGO, "Report from the inspection of the party economic work of the Party Committee of Békés County," Pgo/753/A/5, dated May 26, 1964, MOL 288. f. 37/1964. 7. öe., fols. 41–42.

66. Documents for the county cases listed in the same order as they figure in the text: MOL 288. f. 37/1964 8. öe., fol. 73.; MOL 288. f. 37/1965 6. öe., fol. 98; MOL 288. f. 37/1966 4. öe., fol. 38; MOL 288. f. 37/1966 4. öe., fol. 201.; MOL 288. f. 37/1966 5. öe., fol. 3; MOL 288. f. 37/1967 3. öe., fol. 48; MOL 288. f. 37/1968 4. öe., fol. 46; MOL 288. f. 37/1968 5. öe., fol. 60; MOL 288. f. 37/1974 3. öe., fol. 43; MOL 288. f. 37/1974 4. öe., fol. 100; MOL 288. f. 37/1975 2. öe., fols. 252–253; MOL 288. f. 37/1975 3. öe., fols. 48–49; MOL 288. f. 37/1976 6. öe., fol. 42; MOL 288. f. 37/1976 6. öe., fol. 91; MOL 288. f. 37/1976 6. öe., fol. 126; MOL 288. f. 37/1976 6. öe., fol. 205; MOL 288. f. 37/1976 6. öe., fol. 20; MOL 288. f. 37/1976 6. öe., fol. 165; MOL 288. f. 37/1977 3. öe., fol. 189; MOL 288. f. 37/1977 6. öe., fols. 135–136; MOL 288. f. 37/1977 4. öe., fol. 68; MOL 288. f. 37/1978 13. öe., fol. 120; MOL 288. f. 37/1978 13. öe., fol. 159; MOL 288. f. 37/1980 13. öe., fol. 62.

67. PGO, "Tájékoztató jelentés az 1975. évi ellenőrzések tapasztalatairól" (Summary report informing about the experience of the inspections carried out during 1975), PGO/271/1976/Tné, Budapest, April 22, 1976, MOL 288. f. 37/1975. 2. öe., fols. 295–296. A major inspection of the use of public cars covering 170 economic unit, including several government ministries, stated that in the public sector "Often times the case is that people in leading positions use the cars in an exclusive manner, which significantly impedes the rational utilization of the cars, in an organized and coordinated manner." (State Secretary Gyula Dabronaki, President of the Commission of People's Control, "Összefoglaló jelentés a közületi személygépkocsi állomány alakulásának és rendeltetészerű használatának ellenőrzéséről" (Summary report on the inspection concerning the development of the public car stock and its regular use), Budapest, September 15, 1976, MOL XVII-2-a, 13. t. 424. tsz., 1976, box nr. 210., 6.)

68. PGO, "Az apparátus gépkocsiközlekedési helyzete (Vázlat)" [The situation of automobility in the apparatus (Outline)], presented to the August 26, 1977 meeting of the division leaders (*alosztályvezetők*) at the PGO, MOL 288. f. 37/1977. 8. öe., fol. 79.

69. "Minutes of the meeting of county economic chiefs on 5 April," PGO, MOL 288. f. 37/1958. 1. öe., fol. 144.

70. Gyula Fodor, Chairman of the Central Committee of Revision, and Árpád Nagy, inspector of the CCR, "Report on the economic management of the party during the first half-year of 1958," MOL 288. f. 37/1958. 1. öe., fols. 413–414.

71. József Lantos, PGO, "Report informing about the use of stipulated budget expenditures during 1957," February 10, 1958, MOL 288. f. 37/1957. 1. öe., fols. 251–253.

72. The PGO put forward a proposal to increase the number of cars available for district party committees with the argument, that "Besides cars, other means of transport either because of their timetables or because of the health hazards involved in their use, can only be resorted to under specific conditions." (Mrs.

Pálné Laczkó, "Proposal to supply a second car to 21 district committees, etc.," April 19, 1960, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1960. 14. őe., fol. 51). Indeed, riding motorbikes in wintertime was not good for anyone's health; and it is also quite probable that collective transport outside county centers and other cities was hardly comparable to the networks binding Budapest and the county centers together.

73. PGO, "Report on the comprehensive inspection [*brigádmunka*] in Komárom county, from 1st to 3rd April 1959," *MOL* 288. f. 37/1959. 2. őe., fol. 94.

74. Ferenc Havas, PGO, "Report on the thematic inspection of the economic management of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth Organization," PGO/561/2/1977-78, January 25, 1978, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1977. 4. őe., fol. 102.

75. PGO, "Report on the car use of the Central Committee apparatus," Pgo/1202/5, November 17, 1960, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1960. 14. őe., fol. 58.

76. Report on the car use of the Central Committee apparatus," Pgo/1979/4, December 20, 1960, (a revised version of the 17 November report), *MOL* 288. f. 37/1960. 14. őe., fol. 96.

77. Dezső Lakatos, PGO chief, "Some measures of economy in the Central Committee apparatus taken by the PGO," Pgo/232, February 26, 1965, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1965. 2. őe., fol. 26.

78. PGO, "Report on the implementation of the 1968 budget," March 23, 1969, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1968. 2. őe., fols. 41–42.

79. PGO "Plan for the Central Committee's budget for 1969," November 16, 1968, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1969. 2. őe., fols. 50–51.

80. PGO, "Plan for the Central Committee's budget for 1970," *MOL* 288. f. 37/1970. 3. őe., fol. 106.

81. Gyula Farkas, PGO, "Proposal for the 1974. annual budget of the Central Committee apparatus," November 23, 1973, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1974. 2. őe., fol. 63.

82. PGO, Budget and Planning Division, "Proposal for the Central Committee's budget for 1979," November 16, 1978, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1978. 7. őe., fols. 51–52.

83. Gyula Farkas, PGO, "The implementation of the 1971 budget of the Central Committee," March 27, 1972, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1971. 2. őe., fol. 30.

84. József Kozári, head of PGO, to all economic department chiefs of the county organization, Budapest, September 24, 1971, PGO/557/1971, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1971. 3. őe., fol. 1. This measure was then confirmed by the resolutions of the CC Secretariat of December 20, 1971, in connection with their discussions over the budget of 1972 (József Kozári to Central Committee department chiefs, December 22, 1971, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1971. 2. őe., fols. 138–141.

85. Minutes of the MSZMP CC Secretariat's meeting of July 17, 1972, *MOL* 288. f. 7/1972. 407. őe., fol. 27.

86. See, for example, the report of the PGO from 32 local inspections in 1973: "Report to inform comrade Károly Németh concerning the experience of the 1973 inspections," Pgo/241/Hné, June 20, 1974, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1973. 4. őe., fol. 70.

87. In 1972 1,2 million kilometers were covered in chauffeurless party cars, a mileage corresponding approximately to the annual workload of 40-50 professional chauffeurs. In costs of the central party garage in Budapest this brought with it an economy of 1,3 million Fts -- József Kozári, PGO chief, "Report to the Secretariat on the implementation of the resolution re-regulating the personal car-use," Pgo/264/10, dated Budapest, May 22, 1973, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1973. 1. őe., fol. 108.

88. PGO, “(Draft) Instructions regarding the implementation of February 4, 1980 resolution of the Secretariat ... (To be discussed at the March 5 meeting of the division leaders [of the PGO]),” PGO/187, MOL 288. f. 33/1980. 4. öe., fol. 76.

89. József Kozári, PGO chief, “Report to the Secretariat on the implementation of the resolution re-regulating the personal car-use,” Pgo/264/10, dated Budapest, May 22, 1973, MOL 288. f. 37/1973. 1. öe., fol. 108.

90. According to a draft memorandum from August 1977, the ‘chauffeurless’ mileage in the preceding 12-month period amounted to more than 1 million kilometers (PGO, “The car transport situation of the apparatus /Draft/. Memo for the August 26, 1977, meeting of the departmental division chiefs,” Budapest, August 24, 1977. MOL 288. f. 37/1977. 8. öe., fol. 78).

91. József Kozári, PGO department chief, “Report on the main experience of the 1976 inspections carried out at central and provincial (district) party organizations,” PGO/216/1977., March 24, 1977, MOL 288. f. 37/1977. 3. öe., fol. 7.

92. Dr. Gyula Farkas, PGO, “Report on the car use in the party, communist youth, and social organizations,” December 15, 1977, memo discussed at the December 19, 1977, meeting of division leaders at the PGO, MOL 288. f. 37/1977. 10. öe., fol. 125.

93. *Pártgazdasági és Ügykezelési Ügyrendi Értesítő. A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Központi Bizottsága Pártgazdasági és Ügykezelési Osztályának Közleményei* [The PGO’s newsletter produced to inform lower-level party/economic administrators as to policies, procedures and norms the PGO wished them to observe], Budapest, October 1958, Nr. 5., MOL 288. f. 37/1958. 1. öe., fols. 359 ff., 10.

94. PGO, Minutes of the meeting of division leaders [*alosztályvezetői értekezlet*], November 9, 1959, MOL 288. f. 37/1959. 11. öe., fols. 43–44.

95. *Pártgazdasági és Ügykezelési Ügyrendi Értesítő. A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Központi Bizottsága Pártgazdasági és Ügykezelési Osztályának Közleményei*, Budapest, March 1961, Nr. 2., MOL 288. f. 37/1961. 2. öe., fols. 208 ff., 4.

96. See, for example, the ‘serious warning’ issued to Comrade Vodál, economic chief of the Komárom County Committee – Minutes of the national meeting of economic department chiefs, February 26–27, 1962, Budapest. Pgo/461, MOL 288. f. 37/1962. 1. öe., fols. 137–138.

97. The detailed instruction for the implementation of the resolution of June 11, 1963, is in: *Pártgazdasági és Ügykezelési Ügyrendi Értesítő. A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Központi Bizottsága Pártgazdasági és Ügykezelési Osztályának Közleményei*, Budapest, November 18, 1963, Nr. 3., MOL 288. f. 37/1963. 7. öe., fol. 18., 4. New additional regulations, in accordance with the norms obtaining in state administration, were issued in 1965: Cf. *Pártgazdasági és Ügykezelési Ügyrendi Értesítő. A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Központi Bizottsága Pártgazdasági és Ügykezelési Osztályának Közleményei*, Budapest, October 20, 1965, Nr. 6., MOL 288. f. 37/1965. 3. öe., fol. 69., 7.

98. On these concerns, see the exchanges between József Veres, Minister of Labor, Imre Párdi, Chief of Economic Policy Department, MSZMP Central Committee, and Dezső Lakatos, Chief of PGO, Pgo/1233, February 1965, MOL 288. f. 37/1965. 2. öe., fols. 106–107.

99. László Gács, “Report to the Central Committee of Revision. The utility, method of use, and control of the use of private cars at the party companies,”

KRB/1/5/66/7-15., Budapest, May 26, 1966, attached to András Horváth, Chairman of CCR, to Dezső Lakatos, chief of PGO, August 4, 1966, *MOL* 288.f. 37/1966. 6. őe., fols. 149–151.

100. Proposals (“Strictly confidential!,” Pgo/349) attached to András Szatmári, PGO, to Central Committee Secretary Rezső Nyers, May 28, 1971, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1973 [sic!]. 1. őe., fol. 63.

101. Gyula Farkas, PGO, “The implementation of the 1971 budgetary plan for the Central Committee,” March 27, 1972, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1971. 2. őe., fol. 30.

102. “Report to inform comrade Károly Németh concerning the findings of the 1973 inspections,” Pgo/241/Hné, June 20, 1974, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1973. 4. őe., fol. 70.

103. PGO, “Report to the Secretariat on the experience of economic management in 1973,” Pgo/230, Budapest, April 18, 1974, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1973. 1. őe., fols. 100–101.

104. Ferenc Havas, PGO, “Report on the main findings of the 1974 inspections,” Pgo/Bné/367, Budapest, April 15, 1975, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1974. 1. őe., fol. 93.

105. PGO, preparatory notes for the 1975 budget of the party apparatus, 28 March 1976, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1975. 1. őe., fols. 104–105.

106. PGO, “Report on the inspection of party economic work at the Veszprém County Party Committee,” Pgo/391/Hné, Budapest, October 23, 1974, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1974. 4. őe., fol. 133.

107. PGO, “Report on the inspection of party economic work at the Pest County Party Committee,” Pgo/389/2/Hné, Budapest, September 2, 1974, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1974. 4. őe., fols. 100–111.

108. PGO, “Report on the inspection of party economic work in 1974 at the Szabolcs County Party Committee,” PGO/235/2/Tné, Budapest, May 26, 1975, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1974. 4. őe., fols. 66–68.

109. PGO, “Report on the inspection of party economic work at the Hajdu-Bihar County Party Committee,” PGO/184/9/Hné, Budapest, July 25, 1974, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1974. 3. őe., fols. 158–159.

110. PGO, “Report on the inspection of party economic work at the Somogy County Party Committee,” PGO/184/8/Hné, Budapest, July 18, 1974, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1974. 3. őe., fols. 79–80.

111. László Karakas, PGO chief, Introductory statement to the September 5, 1977 national meeting of economic managers, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1977. 1. őe., fols. 73–75. See also the revised general regulations, corroborating these points, issued in 1978: “Instructions for the regional party and communist youth apparatuses (Outline),” n. d., *MOL* 288. f. 37/1978. 10. őe., fols. 99–109. For the details of a car sales campaign, see the PGO’s report on 1978, when they distributed 1254 cars among members of the apparatus: Dr. Gyula Farkas, PGO, “Report on the experience of the 1978 private car sales campaign,” Budapest, January 31, 1979 (To be discussed at the February 12, 1979 meeting of deputy department chiefs of the PGO), *MOL* 288. f. 37/1979. 1. őe., fols. 36–38. The same report for 1979: *MOL* 288. f. 37/1979. 3. őe., fols. 248–249.

112. László Karakas, PGO chief, “Introductory statement to the national meeting of party economic managers (May 22, 1978),” Pgo/341, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1978. 1. őe., fols. 82–83.

113. Dr Gyula Farkas, PGO, “Report to the Secretariat ...,” Draft, PGO/569/981, October 24, 1981, *MOL* 288. f. 37/1981. 6. őe., fol. 30.

114. In the early years when I was a university student, I had a neighbor who was a high-level functionary (deputy minister) in a government department. Every day a big black Mercedes took him to his office in the morning and brought him home in the afternoon. One morning, as I was leaving for the university, I found him outside his house. He seemed lost and embarrassed. He asked me if he could join me getting to the central parts of the city. On our way to the bus stop, he explained that his car needed servicing and the responsible administrator at his office forgot to send a replacement car for him. (I guess that was a tough day for the administrator!) As we climbed onto the bus, he asked me where the conductor was as he needed to buy a ticket. He had not been aware that there had been no conductors on the buses and streetcars of Budapest for almost ten years and that the tickets had to be bought in advance of one's journey. We had to get off the bus to buy tickets for him. As we rolled from the North of Buda (*Óbuda*) towards downtown Budapest, we passed several streets bringing in traffic from the high end (XIIth and IInd) districts of the capital. It was rush hour. We stood side by side, squeezed to the window and well shaken at the rear end of the overcrowded bus, and observed several large black limos swishing us by, with important leaders of our country sitting comfortably behind and right of the chauffeur, immersed in the party daily or some very important document . . .

115. Papers of KNEB, *MOL* XVII-2-a, Box nr. 211.

Conclusion

For at least three centuries, the human world has been experimenting with several variants (or projects) of socialism. Whichever of them we would take a closer look at, its protagonists would most certainly claim their project's superiority both in relation to the past and in relation to any concurrently existing social order by virtue of its (a) rationality, (b) humanity, and (c) at least equity (social/distributive justice) if not directly equality. Even the Leninist-Stalinist version, the project of the state-socialist social order, insisted on claiming these characteristics in its self-understanding. It firmly believed to be superior to its nemesis, capitalism, by transferring practically the whole productive and distributive apparatus of society from private to public (state and state-controlled cooperative) ownership, by introducing annual, five year and longer term central planning of economic activity and, indeed, all social activities. Centralized management (or, as János Kornai called it using the terms of Karl Polányi, *bureaucratic coordination*) was supposed to secure not merely the most rational and efficient use of all resources. Just as well, it did allegedly put people's destiny firmly into their own hands, bringing alienation, exploitation, and oppression to an end. The only class power allowed was that of the power of the working classes and even that only temporarily until all the remnants (including the technological-economic backwardness) inherited from the pre-revolutionary era were eliminated.

But to show the road and usher society toward a genuine collectivism, that is, an ideal social order constituted by the free (voluntary) association of free individuals where human relations are no longer kept hostage either by bureaucratic hierarchies or forms of the commodity-money nexus, there was, at least during a historical period of transition, the need for an *avant-garde* deploying the forces of the brightest and most committed representatives of the workers' class. No doubt, this was the single most significant addition (and modification) Lenin made to Marx's "utopia turned into science." The period of transition was depicted and believed to be a straight avenue along which a new, socially collectively oriented Socialist Man would be created, a free individual developing his/her many-sided creativity due to, and within, the frameworks of an ongoing interaction with society.

This was, then, in a nutshell, the creed and the ideals toward which state-socialist societies were claimed to be moving. If we now take a closer look at the role of the *avant-garde* (the 'professional revolutionaries,' in effect, the party-state apparatus class), it can be said to have been at least twofold. On the one hand, it was to provide leadership and perform the required decision-making within the framework of Leninist "democratic centralism." On the other hand, it was also expected that these professional revolutionaries' working and private life would offer shining examples of socialism's new ethos: of the new Socialist (or Soviet) Man, with his social engagement, collectivism, modesty, unbreakable loyalty to the workers and their interests, to the cause of building up a new humanized civilization to the benefit of all. The expectation was that every party member (and, *even more*, everyone in positions of decision making) should be an example worthy of following "not only in his professional, official, or party work, but also in his private life."¹

Of course, the point with our explorations in the preceding chapters was not simply to show the sizeable gap between creed and greed, between the self-description of the state-socialist project (its ideological credo) and its realities. Contemporary criticism (particularly from the corner that at the time was called the "New Left") did that abundantly. It was exactly this criticism that received a genuinely socialist-realist response: the rhetorical innovation of Eric Honecker's "real existierender Sozialismus" (1973). Unlike in the earlier (Stalinist) phase of the history of state socialism, where the prevalent *mentalité* made it a norm to superimpose "a better 'soon' on a still imperfect 'now,'"² the cynical protagonist of the Brezhnev era found excusable the underperformance of state socialism in terms of socialist values with reference to the circumstances under which the state-socialist project operated. To paraphrase its message, it said "Do not blame us! Under the prevailing conditions, only this much socialism has proved possible."

A bit later, this was quickly and thickly wrapped into the silky tissue of socialist realism, again. Some of this “wrapping” was offered already before Honecker’s innovation. Like Georg Lukács’s notorious claim on Christmas Eve of 1967: “even the worst socialism is better than the best capitalism.”³ Even though, in the context, there were some extenuating circumstances under which this was said,⁴ Lukács’s claim can rightly be seen as one of the worst examples of systemic relativism. Then, in the second half of the 1970s there was an aggressive campaign by Eastern Europe’s agit-prop apparatuses to assimilate the discourse of real existing socialism to the socialist realist mode of thought and *mentalité*. At the 60th anniversary of the “Great October” (1977), the Soviet Academy of Sciences arranged a major conference with some 80 international participants. Central Committee Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, Boris Ponomarev went out of his way to reassure his audience that the norm to superimpose “a better ‘soon’ on a still imperfect ‘now’” was still in place and to be observed:

Life has brought with it new concepts and definitions. Thus, for example, the concept of *existing socialism* popped up. There are people who doubt whether it is an appropriate concept. . . . Indeed, what does it mean when we talk about existing socialism?

Existing socialism is a *well-defined state-political reality*. A new type of state in which the power belongs to the working people headed by the working class and its revolutionary avant-garde, the communist party. . . .

Furthermore, existing socialism is a well-defined economic reality. A qualitatively new mode of production resting on the public ownership of the means of production and putting an end to exploitation. . . .

Existing socialism is a *new type of social relations*. . . . [it is a society where] the principles of social equality and justice come true . . .

Existing socialism is a *new cultural and moral reality*. It generates qualitatively new kinds of human relations characterized thoroughly by the spirit of comradeship and humanism. It is a new socialist culture that includes the greatest achievements of human civilization. It articulates new moral values based on which it creates a new type of person with a highly developed sense of duty as a citizen, bright ideals and new moral characteristics. It creates the new socialist form of life that secures the many-sided and harmonic development of the individual.⁵

Honecker’s ask to accept realities as they were was in no time replaced by the old Stalinian discursive practice of focusing upon the budding bright future inside the yet somewhat imperfect now.

What we have found in our explorations reveals a different meaning of *real existierender Sozialismus*: It was a social order that promised but singularly failed to constitute a serious rival in economic-technological terms to capitalism and that even more spectacularly failed to bring about the

alternative modernity it claimed to offer in terms of a new civilization, a new type of everyday and private life.

The anti-capitalist revolution, creating to begin with "socialism in one country" and then, after 1945, a "socialist world system" of global ambitions, stumbled from crisis to crisis and, by the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, appeared to have run out of both resources and creativity with regard to asserting a convincing socialist *Sonderweg* when it comes to modern everyday. The experimentation of building collectivist forms and infrastructure from below during Russia's revolutionary 1920s was killed in the bud by Stalin's Thermidor from 1929 and on. Khrushchev's initiative to give a boost to searching for, promoting as well as imposing from above collectivist solutions for a new socialist everyday in the late 1950s early 1960s (during the first wave of COMECON long-term planning) ended abruptly with the coup by Brezhnev and Kosigin. Nor did romantic-revivalist hopes about a miracle that the Cuban revolution would bring with it materialize. Finally, Western collectivist subcultures of the 1960s and early 1970s, responding to alienation, to the pathologies of "mass society" (the "lonely crowd") of the meaningless consumerist chase for abundance, couldn't even serve as a source of inspiration for renewal in the East.

As we have seen, instead of Ponomariov's "new socialist form of life," modern everyday under Hungary's Kádarian version of state-socialism developed from the late 1950s and early 1960s along a path (with consumerism and individualism) more reminiscent of the capitalist civilization than of a pioneering new type of modernity. This tendency was noticed and commented upon by contemporaries, some mockingly or derisively (like the cartoonists of *Ludas Matyi* or the makers of the feature film, *Don't Waste the Gas!*), others bitterly over what seemed to have been a lost historical opportunity (like the writer Pál Szabó and several respondents of the survey arranged by the Committee on Long-Term Planning for Labor Force and Living Standards in 1969–1970). We have also found contemporary commentators who registered, as a matter of fact, that what one saw in Hungarian society in the 1960s and 1970s did "signify ... the hardships in finding new solutions, except for the pathetic imitation of the rightly critiqued 'consumer society'" (Iván T. Berend). From the point of view of a normative image of how an authentic socialist civilization should look like, Berend's damning judgment was both correct and understandable. Analytically, however, it missed the point. For Hungary of the Kádár era was not a "pathetic imitation." Hungary looked exactly like a country and society would look when firmly placed in the semi-developed periphery of the capitalist world system. A country that did make advances compared to its interwar self but remained to be a relatively backward corner compared to Western Europe's or North America's highly developed

capitalist societies, that is, the economies and societies constituting the hegemonic center or core of the world system with a powerful pull exercised by its soft power over the rest of the world. The Kádárist social contract (the trade-off between individual prosperity and political citizenship), the economic reforms of the 1960s boosting the sway of market regulation, the newly won legitimacy for individuals and groups (like various firms) to pursue economic gains (profit) in economic activity, the substantial relaxations from the end of the 1950s of the restrictions on travel and tourism from and to the West, the increasing economic, cultural, scientific, etc. exchanges and ties with the West—all made this fact more visible and tangible in spite of the fog the ongoing Cold War continued to generate (a fog that contributed to the persistence of the idea that capitalism and socialism were two separate and autonomous worlds where not even the laws of nature worked the same way). What Professor Berend saw was not “pathetic imitation”—it was a pathetic (cheaper and, in many respects messy) edition of the capitalist civilization. It was demand-side abundance: it was what a peripheral society subjected to a dictatorship could and tended to achieve in terms of a “consumerist” modernity and its civilization of the everyday.

Many of the phenomena that perplexed and troubled contemporary observers were characteristic symptoms of a semi-developed society—a society where dreams and desires informing aspirations and actual practices of consumption were affected by demonstration effects trickling down from the well-to-do and powerful in society as well as travelling horizontally, across national and systemic borders. The consequences were perverted consumer preferences (chasing and purchasing “objects of desire” that were satisfying at best aspirational needs, in advance of taking care of all the basic needs of one self and one’s family’s), the overstretch evident in private personal consumption’s share in the GDP in relation to the country’s economic performance (GDP per capita), the “uneven development” where families, living in houses without running water, invested their limited resources into washing machines, etc. Demand-side abundance could rightly be seen not only as a systemic phenomenon, that is, as a phenomenon attendant to consumerism unleashed under conditions of state socialism but also as a characteristic phenomenon of semi- and underdeveloped economies and societies in the capitalist world system.⁶

Boris Ponomarev’s idyllic rendering of “real existierender Sozialismus” as the “best of all possible worlds” was misleading not only in its claim that state socialism brought with it “social equality and justice.” His assertion about ubiquitous “comradeship and humanism” characterizing human relations also witnessed the Leibnizian optimism of the communist master narrative about state-socialism. There was neither

equality nor justice (and certainly no distributive justice) across the borderlines between the ruling apparatus class and the working classes of state-socialist society. But there was one thing that both members of the apparatus class and the society under them shared experience with and indulgence in: demand-side abundance, that is, consumerism, the attendant acquisitive lust, under the conditions of sustained quantitative and qualitative shortages.

Our data presented previously (table 4.4) indicate that the distance between top nomenklatura salaries and average industrial wages was not particularly great, especially not compared to any society outside the Soviet Bloc. Social policies, institutions, various subventions have also contributed to the egalitarian appearances in state-socialist societies. But most of the allowances, subventions, support, whether monetary or *in natura*, went out irrespective of the size of earnings and general economic situation of the families supported, and thus contributed to just as much as they ameliorated inequalities.

Also, through analyzing a selection of party disciplinary cases, we have seen functionaries of the party-state successfully to elbow themselves forward, often times through institutions that were there to assist families in the most exposed, low-income social groups, to acquire highest quality housing, to secure privileged access to "markets" of scarce goods and services. Whether it was with regard to laying hands on a large and well-furnished apartment, to the building with public resources of a weekend dacha, to the acquisition of coveted, expensive "colonial" furniture or "classy" lion statuettes to be set up at the entrance of one's house, or to the purchase of a car without having to spend years in line for it but with extraordinarily favorable credit from the National Savings Bank, the functionary prevailed.

The simple statistics presented in 1968 by sociologist Zsuzsa Ferge, Hungary's leading scholar of social stratification and inequalities at the time, also speak for themselves. Contrasting the highest positioned statistically observed category, the group of those in high social positions or "leaders and intellectuals" (*vezető állásúak és értelmiségiek*) as it was called in the official statistics, with the lowest one, the unskilled workers (*segédmunkások*), Ferge found that in terms of average size of housing, the difference was not particularly shocking: 1.9 rooms vs 1.2, in a national stock of housing where the share of units with three or more rooms was merely 4%. It was a bit sharper contrast between the most frequently occurring (modal) sizes of housing in each of the two categories: in the uppermost social group this was the two-room apartment (in 53% of the cases), while among unskilled manual workers the one-room apartment (69%). As we move toward more qualitative indicators regarding housing, the gap becomes increasingly visible. Ferge approached qualitative differences in housing on the basis of the

level of “civilizatory equipment” (the level of “comfort” the housing offered) and used the presence or non-presence of bathrooms in the housing unit as the focal criterion: “We chose the bathroom, because it kind of epitomizes all the essential elements: where there is a bathroom, there tends to be not only electricity, but—in most of the cases—also running water [and sewage—G.P.], as well as kitchen and toilette.”⁷ In the country as a whole, 20% of all the households had bathrooms. Among the houses/apartments belonging to the uppermost category (leaders and intellectuals), the share of units with bathrooms was 64%, while merely 3% sported a bathroom of the housing units belonging to manual workers in agriculture. Another qualitative indicator is the level of overcrowding in housing of the various social strata. According to the contemporary norm, an overcrowded housing unit (house or apartment) had 3.5 or more residents per room. Only 7% of the housing disposed of by the uppermost stratum could be regarded as overcrowded. On the other hand, of the housing units inhabited by skilled workers and their families, 23% were overcrowded and 40% of the houses/apartments belonging to unskilled workers. Yet another indicator used by Ferge was the share of families living in one room only, in each stratum. In the country still 65% of the families lived in one room in the mid-1960s. In fact, 50% of the large families (with five or more members) were forced to squeeze themselves into one room. But in the category of leaders and intellectuals, only 10% of the large families had to live under such circumstances, while 40 % of the large families of skilled workers and 70 % of the large families of unskilled workers had to squeeze themselves into and conduct their everyday life under the roof of one room only.

The same acquisitive lust that made members of the apparatus class tiptoe along and often cross the borderline between moral and immoral, legal and illegal, as defined in their party-state’s moral and legal codes, we have also witnessed in the field of mobility, vacationing, and hunting. In each case, what was going on was a rather large-scale “sneaking privatization” of public resources. Political-administrative power attached to positions in decision-making hierarchies was converted into sizeable material-economic advantages for members of the apparatus class, appropriated as swift and comfortable personal car-based mobility, access to scarce goods and services, exclusive possession of the infrastructure of the highest quality leisure and holiday facilities, the best equipped health-care institutions within a formally equitable system of free, universally accessible health care, etc.

The appropriation of the biggest and/or most appealing slice of the cake was pursued often through the actions of individuals (or networks of individuals), even though the number of cases were large enough to be able to speak of widespread, established patterns manifest throughout the Kádár era. This is what we have seen, for example, in the disciplinary

procedures against functionaries of the party-state conducted by the Central Revision Commission (KEB) or in the widespread phenomenon of "sneaking privatization" of the party's cars. Not less significant was, however, when the apparatus class acted and/or stood up collectively (through its representatives) to enhance and/or to protect its perks and privileges, as was shown in the eventual and "only effective" solution to the problem of the apparatus class mobility: the setting up special rules privileging members of the party and state (governmental) apparatuses in their acquisition of private cars that took thousands of new cars from 1972 on out of the market and made them, together with extraordinarily favorable borrowing opportunities, available exclusively for party and state functionaries. Similarly, it was the protection and promotion of the apparatus class interests in maintaining firm control over their exclusive access to the country's best hunting grounds (and the clubs possessing them) which constituted the rationale of the activities of the national network of MAVOSZ (the National Association of Hungarian Hunters) organizations. That is why reading lists of the names of MAVOSZ board members at national as well as county level was like reading the party nomenklatura. Finally, our discussion of the National Council of Trade Unions' (SZOT) attempt in the early 1960s to bring the party's and all the major governmental departments and national authorities' holiday facilities under their control to secure an equitable distribution of opportunities of vacationing across various social strata revealed that class conflict has not been an unknown phenomenon in state-socialist society. It also demonstrated that the apparatus class did not shy away from using its superior power over the working classes, pushing back at the latter's attempt to achieve a more equitable distribution of opportunities of subsidized vacationing. When SZOT's bid to acquire control over all the country's holiday facilities, it was confronted by the impenetrable resistance on behalf of the leaders of government departments and national authorities, the Communist Party's Political Bureau, the country's top political leadership quickly yielded and, reversing their earlier policy, decided they had better leave the status quo untouched. This should have come for SZOT as little surprise, after all, even while they seemingly, "in principle," supported SZOT's bid, the first thing the party's leaders had secured, even before any discussions between SZOT and the various governmental departments took place, was that the holiday facilities belonging to the party apparatus, to the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were placed safely out of the reach of the planned reform. The party-state's top elite themselves undermined all the moral-political grounds they could have had to effectively promote a reform that would have taken away substantial privileges from the party-state apparatus class.

In this book, we often arrive at points where the discussion seems inevitably to be leading to indignation and moral condemnation. This is one of those points. Yes, indeed, this was a ruling class the members of which were preoccupied with enriching themselves and securing to themselves and their families a good life, while the ethos of public servants (after all, this was a political class as well) was relegated into the background. But as much as I am ready to yield to the temptation, I need also to be mindful of history preceding and following the state-socialist episode. Corrupt and/or selfish politicians and public administrators have been a persistent feature of modern Hungarian history ever since the early 1800s (they were the subject of Kálmán Mikszáth's wonderful satire around the end of the nineteenth century). Considering today's crony capitalism, the kleptocratic social order in Hungary under Viktor Orbán as a contrast, it is the modesty and self-restraint of the Kádár era's ruling class that comes into sharp relief.

But it seems to be of much greater historical interest to assess the broader consequences and significance of the practices prevalent in the everyday and private life of the communist apparatus class. Our explorations of apparatus mobility have been particularly instructive in this respect. Our study caught the apparatus class at a historical moment (at the beginning of the Kádár era), when it was still undecided which direction the emergence and development of *modern* mobility would assume in communist Hungary. The number of personal cars in Hungary (a country of 10 million inhabitants) was still under 13,000, and more than two-thirds of these cars belonged to the party-state, most of them obviously serving the mobility of its functionaries. It is therefore safe to claim that it was the cars serving the mobility needs of the party-state apparatus class that exemplified in the eyes of a great majority of Hungarian society all the appealing sides of personal car-based (private) mobility⁸—the comfort of getting from door to door, the independence of timetables, the (individual) freedom saving one from having to share a congested space with a crowd of strangers, having to bear with their bad breath, smell of sweat, imposing, sometimes even impertinent talk, their inquisitive gaze, etc., all this at a time when the networks of public transportation were still heavily underdeveloped, unreliable and when buses, streetcars, trains, and long distance buses were all badly overcrowded.

The choice for future mobility was in the hands of the apparatus class both as a sum of individuals following their own preferences (and making them visible for the rest of society), but also collectively as the central planners and decision-makers of socialist society. As we have seen, in both respects, they chose to follow the path of modern mobility along which the highly developed (capitalist) societies had been faring far ahead of them. We could concretely see how consistently they shunned

public transportation and, as functionaries of the party-state, how they made themselves dependent in meeting their mobility needs on the cars of their party and state. As time went by, they also acquired a leading and pioneering role as private car owners in moving the country toward mass automobilism. Khrushchev's dreams about a "socialist mode" of the use of personal cars (by building out a large network of state-run taxi services and car rentals) side by side with the predominance of public transportation in personal transports had no chance to come true under real existing socialism in counterrevolutionary Hungary (or elsewhere in the Soviet Bloc).

In the first wave of long-term planning (for 20 years ahead in 1961–1962), there were still some feeble gestures (hesitant nods) made in the direction of collectivist solutions in developing the forms and infrastructures of a modern everyday. The mentality prevalent in the second wave (1968–1971), however, planning for the period 1971–1985, showed no mercy to the idea of seeking or experimenting with the creation of a "Socialist Civilization." Future needs for personal car-based mobility, the number of cars to be made available, and the resources required for the necessary development of the road networks, services, etc. were planned based on the trajectories exhibited by "highly developed" economies far ahead of Hungary (and the Soviet Bloc) in terms of GDP per capita. Little wonder, then, that mobility by personal cars became the fastest-growing sector of Hungary's personal transportation already in the 1960s, and its share in the total of personal transports grew from a mere 4.3% in 1950 (and even less in 1960!) to more than 26% by 1972.

Both the functionary's choices shaping his everyday life and his decisions as central planner pushed developments toward the Western (capitalist) type of everyday in mobility, toward the dominance of individualist, personal car-based, mass automobility. As we have seen, by the 1970s and 1980s, the inertia of private mass automobilism had grown overwhelming and, ironically enough, it was yet again the "decadent West" that took, in the 1990s and early 2000s, the leadership in exploring and practically implementing various projects of car-sharing, as well as other (especially urban) alternative forms of mobility.

The party-state apparatus class was where all the agency of socialist modernization was located. Its members were the decision-makers, organizers, and leaders at various levels who planned and steered the processes of investment, industrialization, agricultural development (mechanization, the use of chemicals, etc.), the development of various infrastructures, education, and all the other aspects of the communist effort to bring their countries closer to and then on par with the highly developed Western societies. As private individuals belonging to the highest standing social group, they were also setting trends by their practices and

choices as consumers. They brought to their society a modern everyday characterized by demand-side abundance: while they proved unable, due to a heavy state paternalism, to eliminate shortages, their everyday and private practices promoted consumerism, commodity fetishism, status consumption, perverted preferences, individualist values, etc.—everything but a distinct “socialist way of life.”

There is an interesting anecdote told by János Tímár, who in the 1960s, and much of the 1970s, worked at the National Office of Planning as the head of the department of labor force planning. He tells it in his memoirs as follows:

We had access to a great variety of information at the Office of Planning. We also received regular copies of the secret, “blue” papers issued by the Institute of Mass Communications. In the second half of the 1960s I got hold of a report on the results of the survey research that adopted [to Hungarian conditions] [Tibor] Scitovsky’s ‘satisfaction’ survey. The survey asked the participants of the sample if they were satisfied with the prevalent socio-economic system. The result took me by surprise. Contrary to international experience, in the Hungarian survey, the higher was the hierarchical position of the person asked, i.e., the more s/he belonged to the elite, the more dissatisfied s/he was. Low-paid, unskilled workers living under the worst conditions and workers in agriculture were satisfied with the system. At first sight, the Hungarian results struck me as incomprehensible. . . .

A few years later, Scitovsky visited Budapest and gave a talk . . . As the most important insight yielded by the [customer] satisfaction surveys, he mentioned that in all countries after the war living standards had risen considerably, but the distribution of dissatisfaction among the population remained the same. “The ranking in terms of level of satisfaction corresponds with the rankings in terms of social values and prestige”. . .

In the discussion following his talk, I asked Scitovsky what his assessment would be if in one country the result would be the opposite. “I cannot answer this question”—he said. “I haven’t seen a result like this or similar to this, and I cannot even imagine it.”

Having read the report from the Hungarian survey, I thought, while the contentedness of the commoners [*kisemberek*] meant approval for the Kádarian version of “existing socialism,” the dissatisfaction of the Hungarian elite would sooner or later lead to the demise of the system.⁹

I have made repeated efforts in the last eight or so years to find the report Tímár may have read and/or the documentation of the survey in question—to no avail. Source criticism of Dr Tímár’s account is not helped either by that we cannot know if he had his old copy of the “blue paper” in front of him while writing this section of his memoirs. I believe he did not, and he relied entirely on his memory. No doubt, what Tímár is writing resonates to some extent with Tibor Scitovsky’s work reported in

1976, in *The Joyless Economy*.¹⁰ Where the thinking of Scitovsky and Tímár diverge, however, and where Tímár may have been failed by his memory is not merely that Scitovsky's survey wouldn't ask about how content and happy the people were with the "prevalent social-economic system." Rather, it would typically ask about their satisfaction/happiness with their life. More importantly, however, Scitovsky would have hardly been surprised by a loosening connection between the position people had in social (income, wealth) hierarchies and their satisfaction with their situation. On the other hand, Scitovsky himself was interested to find a satisfactory explanation for the *Easterlin Paradox*, the paradox which is based in the factual observation that happiness (the level of satisfaction) varies directly with income at any given point of time, while no such strong relationship between the long-term (10–15 years) growth of happiness/satisfaction and the growth income can be detected.

But Tímár's somewhat apocryphal story should still be taken seriously for it came from someone who was a native of the group he wrote about. After all, Tímár was head of a department in Hungary's National Office of Planning in the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s,¹¹ and he had seen, heard, and experienced himself everything we have been discussing in the previous chapters of this book. Also, it could certainly be argued that to belong to the ruling class in a state-socialist social order could be a frustrating experience in terms of one's everyday and private life. Due to increasing openness toward the West, members of the apparatus class were among the first to compare their socio-economic situation with that of their counterparts (the political class) in the West, and they certainly understood their situation as inferior. It struck them as inferior in absolute terms, that is, when it came to their income and wealth and, in general, what they could afford. Their Western colleagues appeared far better off also in relative terms: in terms of the socio-economic distance between them and their respective lower classes. From the second half of the 1970s, the voices demanding higher income differentials along increasing levels of education and increasing levels of "complex responsibilities" (as leaders) got ever louder, making the argument that greater differences in incomes were the *sine qua non* of overall economic efficiency. By definition, demand-side abundance meant frustration for everybody, including the functionary in the state-socialist social order, even though the latter, as we have seen, had been better equipped than the commoners under him to cope with it and find avenues for giving vent to his acquisitive lust. For the apparatschik working in the "White House"¹² at Jászai Mari tér in Budapest, it may have been reassuring to know that he could buy bananas and oranges throughout the Winter season in the cafeteria—the fruits that mortal commoners of Budapest (even less of the provinces) could seldom get hold of. But it was, of course, far from enough. They

wanted everything that they knew their Western counterparts had: their elegant suits, blazers, dresses, shoes, their cool cars, their well-equipped households, what appeared to be their cleaner air, their better-preserved nature, their aesthetically pleasing interior design and architecture, appealing urban landscape and, in general, their classy lifestyle.¹³

This is the frustrating contrast that explains why, in Professor Berend's eyes, the achievements of the 1960s and 1970s in Hungary, the "expanding, greyish, prefabricated residential blocks of housing estates and the Trabant" appeared (and indeed were) pathetic.

NOTES

1. The quote was randomly selected from among a plethora of similar utterances in the monthly journal of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, *Pártélet* [Party Life]. In this case, it came from an officer who was secretary of a party organization in the military. *Pártélet* 19, no. 4 (April 1974): 73.

2. Cf. Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Becoming Cultured: Socialist Realism and the Representation of Privilege and Taste," in her *The Cultural Front. Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*, S. Fitzpatrick (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 227, and György Péteri, "Nylon Curtain—Transnational and Trans-systemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East Central Europe," *Slavonica* 10, no. 2 (2004): 117.

3. Péter Rényi and Pál Pándi, "Conversation with György Lukács," *Népszabadság* (the daily paper of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party), December 24, 1967, 22.

4. Lukács was pressed by his interviewers why he had only bad things to say about the Stalin era, after all it was the time that "brought up the people to win the greatest battles of the world war and defeated fascism." To this, Lukács responded "Perhaps I may be permitted to articulate this as follows: in my opinion, even the worst socialism is better than the best capitalism. This is my profound conviction, and I have lived through those times with this conviction. As socialism was being built then as well, even those times had positive elements."

5. From the generous summary of Ponomarev's lecture published by the Hungarian party daily, *Népszabadság*, November 11, 1977, 3.

6. In his *Problems of Capital-Formation in Underdeveloped Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), Ragnar Nurkse was among the first to discuss the international demonstration effect and its consequences in developing economies. He explained that exposure to new goods and/or new ways of life created unhappiness with what had previously been regarded acceptable in developing nations. People would therefore experience pressure to increase access to material goods because they "come into contact with superior goods or superior patterns of consumption, with new articles or new ways of meeting old wants." All this will lead to, he wrote, that the people's "knowledge is extended, their imagination stimulated; new desires are aroused."

7. Zsuzsa Ferge, "About the Way of Life," *Valóság* XI, no. 8 (August 1968): 3.

8. I have already revealed that as a small kid, in the late 1950s, early 1960s, I often joined my father on his hunting excursions during weekends. We would start by settling somewhere in a small countryside village that we used as a base close to the hunting ground. I vividly remember that as we arrived in the car serving my father, the kids in the village gathered immediately around the car. They admired the miracle of a personal car, which most of them had never seen before, with googly eyes: “Vow, look at it – a taxi!” they exclaimed, which shows that they must have heard that people in the big cities were getting around in such cars and they were called “taxi.”

9. János Tímár, *Életrégeny. Szubjektív adalékok a 20. század történetéhez* [The story of a life. Subjective contributions to the history of the twentieth century] (Budapest: Noran Kiadó Kft., 2005), 203–206.

10. Tibor Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy. The Psychology of Human Satisfaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

11. In 1974, János Tímár (1921–2011) left the Central Office of Planning and became professor and head of the Department of Labor Economics in the Karl Marx University of Economics, Budapest.

12. The tall, white building giving house to the headquarters (the Central Committee apparatus) of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, immediately South of the Pest end of the Margit Bridge.

13. N. S. Khrushchev's Memoirs reveal a certain degree of preoccupation with the “fairly high level of culture and personal development, including the clothes they wore” he witnessed among the people in the West (or even among circles of India's political class and intelligentsia). Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, *Memoirs. Statesman (1953–1964)*, vol. 3 (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2007), 102, 131, 729.

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